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Smithsonian

November 2015

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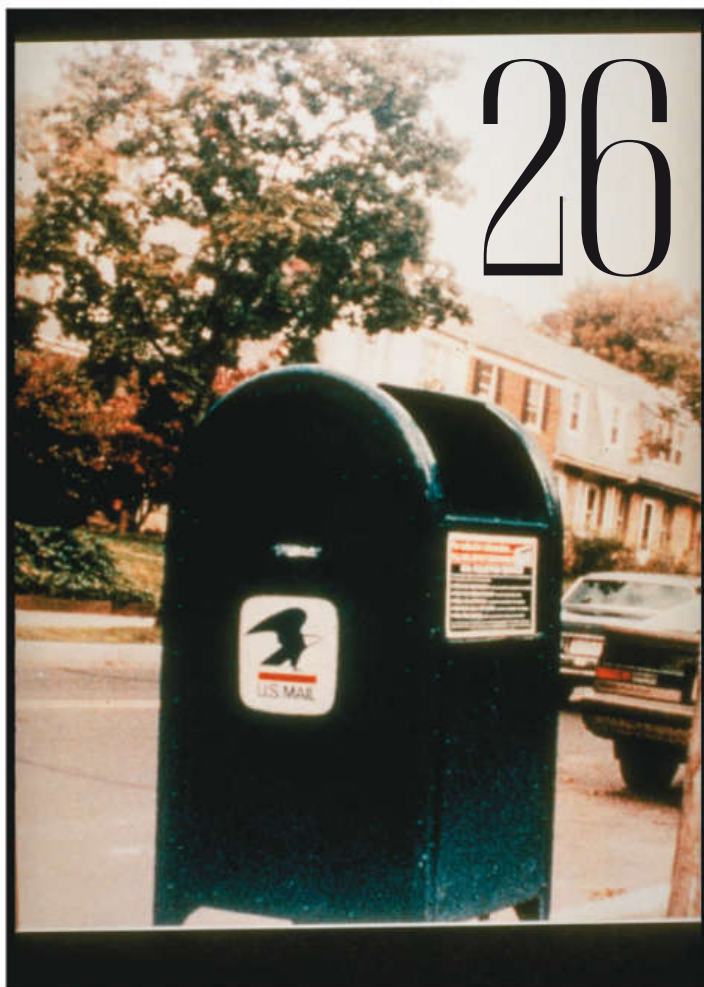
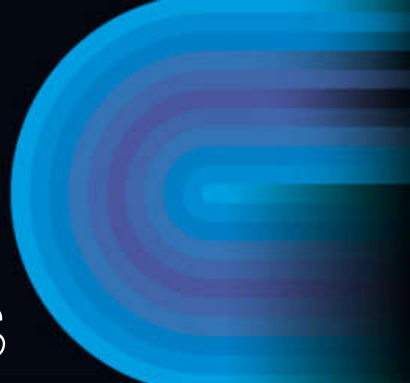


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The Phantom Menace

Was there another, as yet unidentified double agent inside the CIA in 1985, when top intelligence assets were spectacularly betrayed? **BY DAVID WISE**

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Contributors



Stacy Schiff

For her book *The Witches: Salem, 1692* (Little, Brown), Schiff researched the testimony of Tituba, a slave who held the leaders of Salem “under [her] spell,” and then decided to profile her for *Smithsonian* (“The Devil’s Tongue,” p. 34). Schiff says that Tituba “has gone down in history for having contributed one kind of magic when in truth she worked a very different kind.” Schiff has written about history-changing women before: She’s the author of *Véra* (Mrs. Vladimir Nabokov), which was awarded the Pulitzer Prize, and *Cleopatra: A Life*, among other books.

Neal Gabler

While working on his award-winning 2006 biography of Walt Disney, Gabler found that *Fantasia* was a key to his subject’s consciousness (p. 9). “Disney didn’t just want to be the guy known for inventing Mickey Mouse,” says Gabler. “He wanted to be the guy who raised animation to the level of art.” Disney, of course, “had already done that, but in his mind he didn’t feel secure in that achievement.” Gabler is now writing a biography of Edward Kennedy.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY Emma Ridgway

David Wise

The author of acclaimed nonfiction books about espionage, Wise uncovered new details about the possibility of a still-unidentified Soviet spy who infiltrated American and British intelligence in the 1980s (“The Phantom Menace,” p. 26). A “huge break in this piece,” Wise says, was his interview with Andrei Poleshchuk, the son of a Soviet agent who had turned against the KGB and was caught. In one respect, Wise’s reporting casts doubt on the initial U.S. version of events—that it was the convicted spy Aldrich Ames who revealed the identities of compromised Soviet operatives. It now seems clear that another still unidentified mole may have betrayed them. “I was able to pinpoint how these people had fallen under suspicion earlier,” Wise says.



Wayne Lawrence

As a black photographer, Lawrence says he had difficult moments documenting the legacy of the forced migration of slaves (p. 58). What stayed with him “was the heat and the humidity, and thinking about slavery and how millions of people had to work through this heat for generations and how this country is largely built on the backs of slaves.” Lawrence’s photographs have been showcased in major publications and many museums.

Mark Ulriksen

Celebrated for the illustrations and paintings he creates for magazines, including more than 50 covers for the *New Yorker*, Ulriksen has drawn plenty of presidents. Still, depicting George Washington telling a secret was a challenge, if only because so few true renderings of the first president exist. “It’s very rare to see a full figure painting of Washington,” says Ulriksen. So he found himself posing in front of a mirror, creating his own presidential expressions.

T.J. Stiles

“Custer is the exaggerated American, living out the country’s best and worst in a moment of revolutionary change,” says Stiles, author of *Custer’s Trials: A Life on the Frontier of a New America*, a probing new biography he adapted for “The Horse Thief” (p. 50). “The largest themes in American history emerge in the most intimate details of his life.” Stiles received the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize for his previous book on Cornelius Vanderbilt, *The First Tycoon*.



Edward Ball

The author of five books, including *Slaves in the Family*, which won the National Book Award, Ball felt compelled to write about what

he calls the “Slave Trail of Tears” (p. 58) because, he says, “it’s a story that has not made the jump from history departments into national memory.” Ball’s reporting followed both “a paper trail and a geographic trail.” He investigated slave trader records in Virginia, before “retracing the migration story by car.”

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Discussion

Authoritative. Hotch knew Hemingway very well. His book-length memoir of Hem is well worth a read.

@Ed_Renehan ON TWITTER

FROM THE EDITORS *"Hemingway in Love" underscored the great American novelist's popularity, albeit this time online. A.E. Hotchner's story was named a top five long read of the week by both Longreads and Esquire, and was shared by the L.A. Times and Longform. Numerous readers on Twitter announced they would be adding Hotchner's new book, also called Hemingway in Love, to their "to-read" lists. Also on Twitter, at least one reader identified the mysterious library in the image accompanying Jerry Adler's "Enough Said." It's a photograph of the Long Room in the Old Library at Trinity College in Dublin.*

It's Relative

In Brian Greene's article "Gravity's Muse," we find the same time-tried explanation for the curvature of space due to gravity: A moving marble will follow a curved trajectory on a warped wooden floor just as light will do in the presence of a massive object, because of gravity. But the reason that the imaginary marble follows a curved trajectory toward the depression in the floor is that gravity pulls it down. So we explain one effect of gravity by showing another effect of gravity. This is a nicely disguised example of circular reasoning.

Erwin Wechsler
GLENDALE, CALIFORNIA

If the Big Bang is based on Einstein's theory of relativity, and his theory is based on the tenet that nothing can travel faster than the speed of light, and at the Big Bang all matter moved from a single point to enormous distances

in the tiniest fraction of a second, does this not imply that the stars and galaxies moved faster than light, which is impossible according to the overall theory? How do physicists resolve this apparent paradox?

Mike Mellos
RIO RANCHO, NEW MEXICO



Brian Greene responds: As for the warped floor, in longer treatments of general relativity (such as my book *The Elegant Universe*) I myself am fond of emphasizing the limits of this comparison. Analogies in science writing simply provide mental imagery

for complex topics, and on that score the warped floor example does a nice job. Most every analogy, if examined thoroughly, fails to fully align with the science, but if it brings the typical reader a step closer to an intuition regarding an otherwise opaque idea, then on balance this outweighs the inaccuracy. The question about the speed of light during the Big Bang is a great and subtle one. Here's a rough way of thinking about it. In special relativity, Einstein established that no object can travel through space at greater than light speed. However, this does not constrain the speed at which space itself can stretch. Indeed, when we talk about the speed at which distant galaxies separate, we envision those galaxies moving apart because of the swelling of space itself—and there is no limit on that speed.

Learning Curve

I have visited the Gateway Arch in St. Louis ("Curve Ahead") three times,

and was awestruck each time. Suggesting that the construction of this visionary, towering human achievement is to blame for the decline of the city was simple-minded and fatuous. If you really want to explore what happened to the dreams that St. Louis had about becoming the "New York of the Midwest," you need a much longer, serious investigation.

Brenda Petruzzella
COLUMBUS, OHIO

Problematic Pyramid

On page 37 ["The Power and the Glory"], the photo caption states that the pyramid in the background belongs to Khafre. It actually belongs to Khafre's son, Menkaure. Khafre's pyramid is easily distinguished by the intact casing stones near the top.

Sean Berry
PORTLAND, OREGON

Clarification

"Gravity's Muse" mischaracterized GPS technology. In fact, the signals do not bounce between orbiting satellites and a device like the one in a smartphone; rather, the device determines its location solely from signals it receives from multiple satellites simultaneously.

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Phenomena

A CURATED LOOK AT SCIENCE, HISTORY & CULTURE

"I think this thing will *make* Beethoven," Disney once said.

Fantasia
erased the
line between
high art and
pop culture

by Neal Gabler

Mickey Grows Up

When Walt Disney embarked on *Fantasia*, released 75 years ago this month, his reputation was well established. Mickey Mouse and Snow White were cultural touchstones. Both Yale and Harvard had bestowed him with honorary degrees, and no less than Thornton Wilder had called him, along with Charlie Chaplin, one of motion pictures' two great artists, though the accolade wasn't unqualified: The implication was that he was a great *folk* artist, by virtue of his popularity. With *Fantasia*, Disney hoped to achieve something else. "We've got more in this medium than making people laugh," he told his staff. The new film, he said, would "change the history of motion pictures."

And indeed it would. "When, in *Fantasia*, Mickey Mouse clambered up on the (real) podium and shook hands with the (real) conductor Leopold Stokowski," the art critic Robert Hughes wrote in 1973, "high art and low art collapsed into one another."

The moment was dreamed up in 1937, when Disney, dining out in Los Angeles, spotted Stokowski, conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra and well-known man about town, whose romances included Greta Garbo and later the heiress Gloria Vanderbilt, 42 years his junior, whom he married. Disney told the conductor about a musical short he was working on, which sparked Stokowski to expatiate on his own

AMERICAN ICON

dream project: a feature animation set to classical music.

The timing was propitious. Stokowski may have looked like an artiste, with his wild, white mane, but he longed to connect to pop culture. Disney was the perfect match. The two spent months selecting classical pieces, which Stokowski arranged and recorded with his orchestra in Philadelphia, and Disney and his team constructed the animations. Some were cute—centaurs and fauns cavorting for Beethoven's "Pastoral"—or humorous, like the alligators and hippos performing a ballet for Ponchielli's "Dance of the Hours." For Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D Minor, the "masses of color" and "geometrical objects floating in space," in the words of Deems Taylor, the film's tuxedoed host, were completely nonrepresentational—a forerunner to Abstract Expressionism, the postwar American art movement.

For the debut, Disney devised a first-of-its-kind, surround-sound system he called Fantasound, to be installed in first-run theaters. Tickets were sold on a reserved basis. Disney imagined adding new segments in the future, so the film could be released again and again.

But Fantasound proved too expensive to install in every theater. The film had to be substantially cut. And after

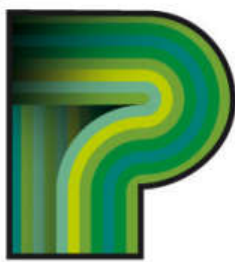
early critical enthusiasm—"a creation so thoroughly delightful and exciting in its novelty that one's senses are captivated by it," raved the *New York Times*—later audiences seemed baffled or bored. It lost more than the modern equivalent of \$15 million and nearly drove the company into bankruptcy.

It was also disastrous for Disney's reputation. Critics who loved the unpretentious folk artist were less adoring when they discovered he had pretensions after all. "First Chaplin learns about class struggle, now Disney meets the Performing Pole," the critic Otis Ferguson sneered in the *New Republic*. Even Disney came to regret it. "Every time I made a mistake is when I went in a direction where I didn't *feel* the thing actually," he told the journalist Peter Martin in an unpublished interview from 1955. "And I did try to be a little smarty-pants."

In the 1960s, however, *Fantasia*'s bright colors and vivid abstractions appealed to a new generation turned on to psychedelia, and the film anticipated Pop artists like Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein. The late horror director Wes Craven called the movie one of his favorites, and Steven Spielberg has said that *Fantasia* influenced *ET*. Recently, the cinematographer Ben Davis said that the upcoming *Doctor Strange*, about the comic-book superhero, would be "Marvel's *Fantasia*" because "it's so sort of out there and different." *Fantasia* has achieved that rare cultural stature: It's a grand failure that became a trailblazer and a part of the national consciousness.



MACIEK JASIK





Fresh Produce

Photos capture the secrets of the gourd life

ART

Maciek Jasik responds

with the well-mannered evasiveness of a sly magician when asked about this arresting image. Peach-colored smoke really is billowing out of this spaghetti squash, the photographer says, and the trick was accomplished with readily available materials. "But I'm not going to reveal how I did it," because that would make the picture "100 percent less interesting." It's one in a series, "The Secret Lives of Fruits and Vegetables"—he has also explored the mysteries of eggplants, cauliflower, a bell pepper and a pineapple—that's meant to jolt us out of complacency. "The idea is to create a sense of confusion . . . to reinvent reality," says the 37-year-old Brooklyn artist, whose enigmatic portraits, still-lives and landscapes have appeared in galleries nationwide. "It's an urge to take something mundane and make it strange." —AMY CRAWFORD

View more of Jasik's photos at Smithsonian.com/veggies

Parts Unknown

How Mary Shelley pieced together her Monster story

TRIBUTE

illustration by John S. Dykes

From a volcano in Indonesia to a frog in Bologna, a ghoulishly large number of ideas and events wormed into Mary Shelley's dazzling mind as she imagined the "hideous phantasm of a man" at the throbbing heart of *Frankenstein*, first published two centuries ago and twitching back to life this month in the new Steampunkish movie *Victor Frankenstein*. Here are some key connections to Shelley's cautionary novel.



1 The 13th-century Castle Frankenstein, in the **Odenwald**, where Johann Dippel (b. 1673), alchemist and grave robber, is said to have experimented with reviving corpses—and, some believe, inspired Shelley.

2 The April 1815 eruption of **Mount Tambora**, which killed tens of thousands, spewed so much ash it cloaked Europe in gloom for many months. It was during 1816's "year without summer" that Shelley and friends enjoyed a haunting Swiss holiday.



A miniature watercolor portrait of Shelley, based on a death mask.

3 Shelley places Victor Frankenstein's childhood in **Geneva**—a nod, perhaps, to where she first conjured him. In June 1816, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, then 18, joined her future husband, the poet Percy Shelley, her stepsister Claire, Lord Byron and the physician John Polidori for a holiday here. But rain and cold kept them indoors, so they told one another ghost stories: Shelley's "creature" and Polidori's *The Vampyre* were born.

4 The first edition of *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* was published in **London** in 1818; five years later, the city saw the first stage adaptation, *Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein*, written by Richard Brinsley Peake. The daughter of London intellectuals, Shelley made use of the city's early scientific explorations. In a journal entry from December 1814, she noted attending "Garnerin's lecture—on Electricity—the gasses—and the Phantasmagoria."

5 Mary visited Percy at **Oxford** in 1815, where his rooms were full of Leyden jars, a friction generator and various alchemical instruments. In the novel, Victor visits the city after meeting England's top scientists.

6 In 1781, Luigi Galvani, a physician in **Bologna**, used an electrically charged knife to make a dismembered frog leg jump. The idea that electricity could "infuse a spark of being," as Victor puts it, impressed Shelley.

7 Victor hikes into **Chamonix** after the creature kills his brother. His descriptions of the valley as a "glorious presence-chamber of imperial Nature" echo letters that Mary and Percy wrote on an 1816 trip there.

8 Shelley spent two teenage years near **Dundee**. In the **Orkneys**, Victor abandons his effort to fashion a companion for the creature. In **Glasgow** after the novel came out, Dr. Andrew Ure tried to revive an executed convict.

9 Victor pursues the creature to "the blue Mediterranean" around **Spezia**. In a real-life Gothic twist, Percy drowned nearby when his boat capsized in a storm four years after the novel was published.

10 The novel ends north of **Archangel**, where an explorer had found Victor, on the verge of death chasing the remorseful creature, who in the finale sets off to "the northern extremity of the globe" to destroy himself in a fire.

Rhinoplasticity

Can advanced devices and genetics save imperiled species?

On the black market, a pound of rhino horn goes for \$30,000—an irresistible sum for the merciless poachers and criminal syndicates that illegally slaughter thousands of rhinos each year in Asia and especially Africa. But now there's a new way to manufacture a facsimile of the coveted material—one of several high-tech efforts to put poachers out of business and save rhinos in the wild from extinction.

Pembient, a Seattle-based bioengineering firm, is using advances in genomic sequencing and DNA synthesis to make knock-off rhino horn in the lab. “If there was ever a time to try something, this would be it,” says Matthew Markus, the company’s co-founder. The start-up’s strategy is based on his observation that pirated software can ruin a tech company that made the original product. Pembient uses yeast engineered with genes that produce rhino keratin, the major protein in horn (also in human hair and nails). After extracting the keratin from the yeast, the technicians mix it with rhino DNA, so the final product has a genetic signature similar to that of actual rhino horn. Markus says he foresees the day when illicit buyers will use genetic tests to authenticate their loot, and he wants his counterfeits to pass muster. In time he hopes to grow—or 3-D print—entire horns

and flood the black market with them, eliminating the incentive to kill the two-ton animals for the sake of their three- or four-pound horns.

A hundred years ago there were 500,000 rhinos worldwide; today there are perhaps 30,000, and four out of five rhinoceros species are classified as vulnerable or critically endangered. Last year, in South Africa alone, poachers killed more than 1,200 rhinos, and 2015 is on track to be just as bad.

Another high-tech remedy is underway there. Members of the Rhino Rescue Project capture a live animal and painlessly inject an antiparasitic drug and a dye into the horn; the chemicals, though harmless to the animal’s health, disfigure the horn, rendering it useless as an ornament or, ground up, as traditional medicine, since the injected drug can cause nausea, vomiting and convulsions in people. “We’ve lost only seven animals over a five-year

period,” says Lorinda Hern, a co-founder of the organization. “This is a triumph by any standard, especially when you consider that South Africa is losing four animals to poaching a day.”

In yet another approach, Protect, a British nonprofit group, has begun implanting South African rhinos in national parks with heart-rate monitors and embedding video cameras in their horns. Whenever an animal’s heart rate jumps, a radio collar sends an alarm, along with GPS coordinates, to park officials, who dispatch rangers to the site by truck or helicopter. “Typically, an anti-poaching force finds out about an incident days later,” says Steve Piper, Protect’s director. “In this case, they’re hot on the poachers’ tracks.” The hope is that poachers eventually will view rhinos wearing the radio collar—bright turquoise for maximum effect—as not worth the risk. —LAURA KRANTZ



A tiny camera is embedded in the horn of a black rhino.



SMALL TALK

Mary Beard

The Cambridge classicist has a new book, *SPQR: A History of Ancient Rome*, out this month.

Which Roman figures would you most like to invite to your dinner table?

Cicero has a modern rep as a fearful old bore, but the Romans thought he was the wittiest man ever. To sit next to him, the empress Livia—I don’t believe the allegations of her poisoning habits. And a massage artist from a grand set of Roman baths, who would surely have the best stories to tell of all.

What would people be surprised to learn comes from ancient Rome?

They were the first people in the West to sort out lavatory technology, though we would find strange their enthusiasm for “multi-seater” bathrooms, with everyone going together.

Do you have a favorite Roman slogan?

When the historian Tacitus said “They create desolation and call it peace,” he gave us a phrase that described conquests over the centuries, up to our own.

Why does Rome still matter?

The extraordinary tradition that underpins much of Western literature is one thing, but so is the inheritance of our politics, beyond terminology (Senate, capitol). The arguments that followed Cicero’s execution of Catiline without trial in 63 B.C. still inform our own debates about civil liberties and homeland security.

CONSERVATION

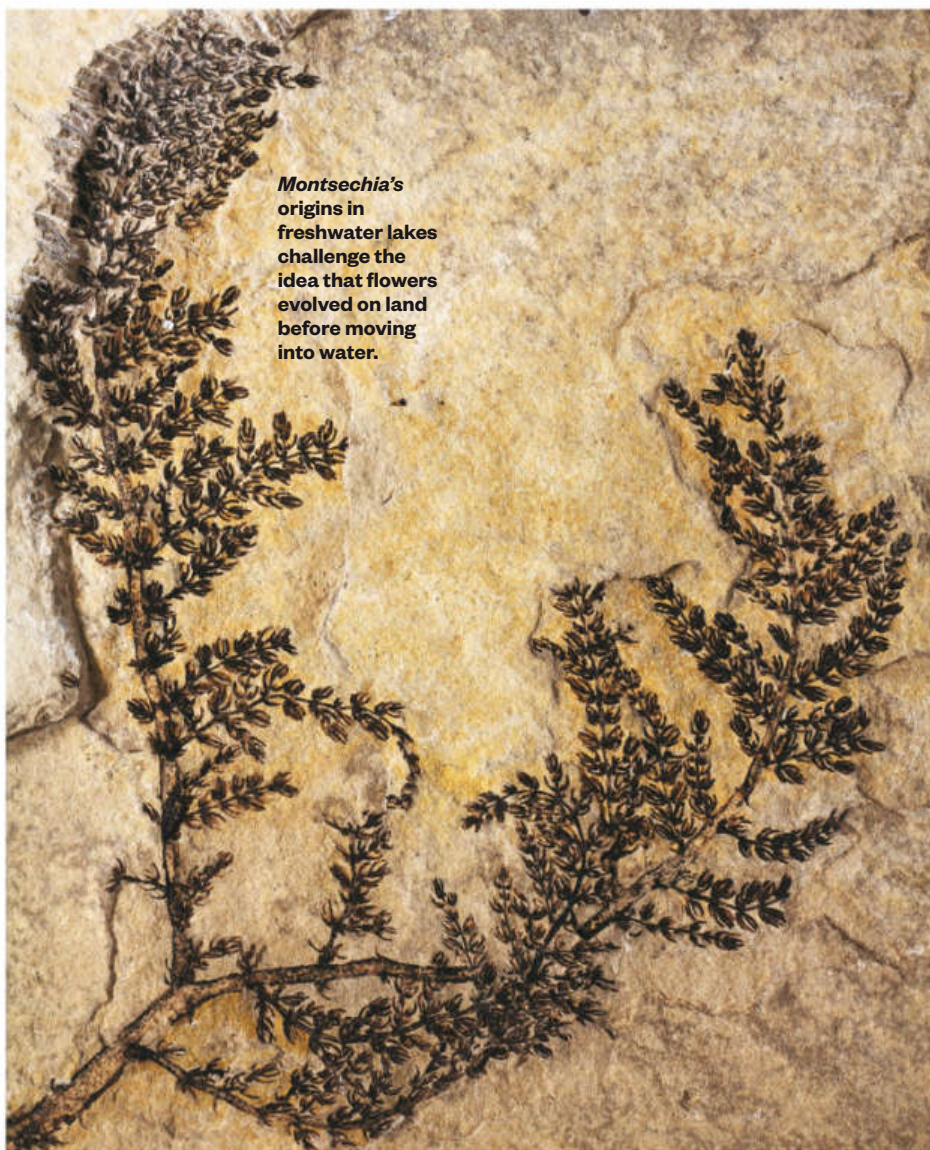


Early Bloomers

They're not the flashiest specimens, but these flowers have the special distinction of being the first

ARTIFACT

The evolution of flowers, Charles Darwin famously said, was an “abominable mystery,” chiefly because they seemed to suddenly burst into the fossil record 100 million years ago. Naturalists have struggled to fill in the blanks that puzzled Darwin, and now, after a dogged search by Bernard Gomez, a paleobotanist from France, there's a new candidate for the oldest known flower. Gomez studied more than 1,000 fossils of the extinct aquatic plant *Montsechia*, recovered in abundance from sites in Spain and preserved in collections across Europe. In the surprisingly messy world of plant taxonomy, *Montsechia* has been classified as a conifer, among other classifications, but Gomez concluded that it possessed enclosed seeds, the hallmark of an angiosperm, or flowering plant. “I went to the British Museum, I went to Paris, I went to Berlin and Barcelona,” he says. A poor excuse for a flower by today's standards, *Montsechia*, which dates to about 130 million years ago, didn't even have petals. Its pollen floated in water instead of through air. But along with ancient specimens from China, Portugal and the Americas, it embodies the humble origins of the glorious forms we see all over the world today. —ELIZABETH QUILL



Montsechia's origins in freshwater lakes challenge the idea that flowers evolved on land before moving into water.



Currently competing with *Montsechia* for the title of oldest known flowering plant is *Archaeofructus*, from China, which has been dated to around the same time in the early Cretaceous.



Excavated in Virginia by a former Smithsonian curator, *Potomacarpus apeleutheron* dates to between 115 million and 125 million years ago, making it one of the oldest known flowers in North America.

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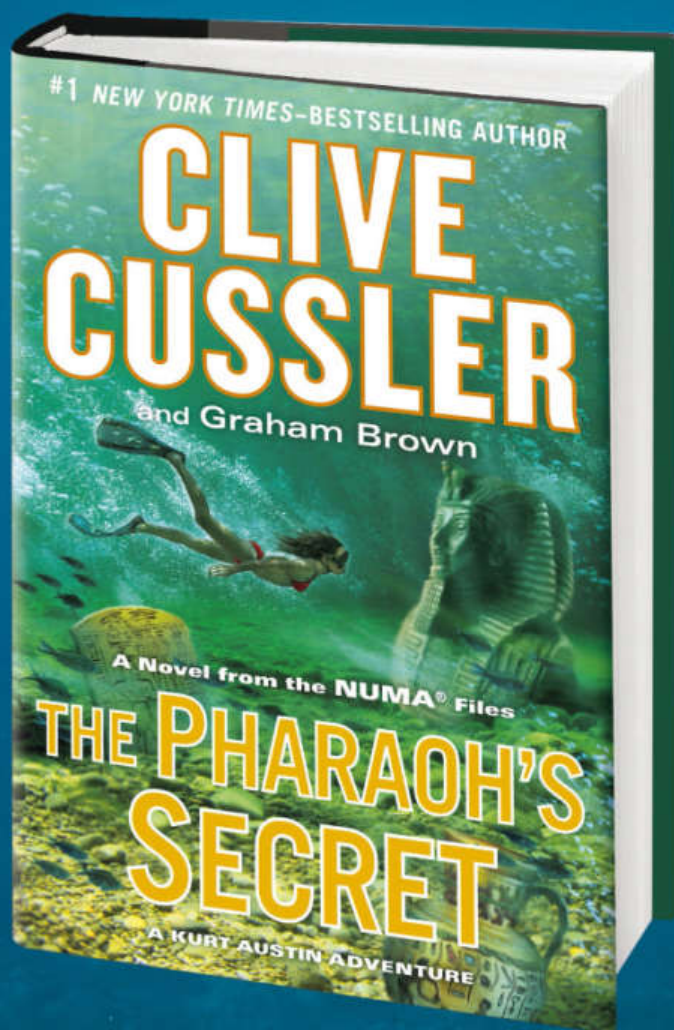
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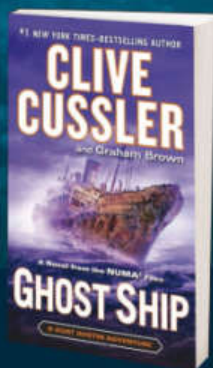
—*Publishers Weekly*

Kurt and Joe encounter a ruthless enemy—a power broker bent on building a new Egyptian empire as glorious as those of the pharaohs. The NUMA team will have to fight to discover the truth behind the legends—but to do that, they must confront the greatest legend of them all: Osiris, the ruler of the Egyptian underworld.

ON SALE NOVEMBER 17



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Behold the Blobfish

How a creature from the deep taught the world a lesson about the importance of being ugly

The world's most misunderstood fish reposes in pickled splendor on a shelf of the basement archives at the Australian Museum's Ichthyology Collection, in Sydney. The smeary flesh of Mr. Blobby—as the photogenic blobfish is affectionately known—is no longer Bubblicious-pink. The famous downturned grin is gone, the tiny currant eyes have receded in deep alcoves, and the nose—which once evoked Ziggy of comic strip fame—is shaped less like a turnip than a fallen soufflé.

Dredged up off the coast of New Zealand during a 2003 research voyage, the specimen has spent the last decade sus-

NATURE CHARISMA

pending in a 70 percent ethyl-alcohol solution. “The fixation process tightened Mr. Blobby’s skin and collapsed his—or her—snout,” laments Mark McGrouther, the museum’s fish manager. “He—or she—now looks like an 85-year-old Mr. Blobby.” Indeed, these days the Blobster suggests nothing so much as a freshly Botoxed baked potato. Has there ever been crueller proof that alcohol changes the way you look?

Of the hundreds of deep-sea critters hauled in on the New Zealand expedition, the *Psychrolutes microporos* was the breakout star. A photograph snapped aboard ship lit up on social media and transformed this squidgy bottom feeder into an aquatic Grumpy Cat, with devoted followers on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Tumblr.

Seen by few but known by many, Mr. Blobby has been deemed hug-gable enough for plush toys and



BY FRANZ LIDZ

illustration by Matt Collins

NATURE CHARISMA

has inspired an ocean of silly poems, apps, emoji, smartphone games with tag lines like “Build Up Your Hero and EVOLVE! What Strange and Wonderful Things Will He Become?”, memes (“Go Home Evolution: You’re Drunk”) and even a song by children’s book author Michael Hearst:

Blobfish, blobfish, JELL-O of the sea—

Floats upon the bottom, lazy as can be...

Two years ago the blobfish was voted the earth’s most hideous species in an online poll conducted by the British-based Ugly Animal Preservation Society. In its quest to raise awareness of Mother Nature’s endangered but “aesthetically challenged children,” the UAPS chose 11 nominees and enlisted

Aussies embrace their blobs. This is the country that’s home to the so-called pitch drop viscosity experiment, the longest-running—and most tedious—lab test of all time. In 1927, a University of Queensland physics professor placed a blob of congealed tar pitch in a funnel to see how fast it would flow. Eighty-eight years later, nine drops have fallen. To date, more than 31,000 “watchers” have logged into the live webcam that monitors the drips. Despite very little happening, the feed is still more compelling than most shows on Australian TV.

That is, unless the show features Mr. Blobby. A recent episode of “The Octonauts”—a kids’ cartoon program about the underwater adventures of Captain Barnacles and crew—involved Bob Blobfish and his brothers, Bob and Bob. The painfully still Blobfish Bros don’t so much bob in the ocean as hover over its floor.

As often happens with celebrities, the story of the Beast From 650 Fathoms has taken on a life of its own. If tit-tattle is to be believed, Mr. Blobby

was separated at birth from either Kilroy, Mr. Magoo, the pudding-faced comedian Louis CK or Donatella Versace, the fashion designer with lips so plump she can whisper in her own ear.

The most persistent gossip is that blobfish suffer a significant threat and possible annihilation. “I’m not quite sure why that is,” Foot said in his campaign pitch. “Could be because mankind is destroying its habitat, or maybe bad people have been stabbing the blobfish, or it could just be that the blobfish has been a bit careless.”

In Northern Ireland, the Belfast *Telegraph* ran a story about the plight of endangered blobfish, which it claimed often die as bycatch in fishing trawlers. In England, a *Guardian* editorial carped about “anthropomorphic lookism” and its distorted priorities: “The blobfish has something better than the regular features and soft contours of conventional beauty: with its droopy mouth and gelatinous cheeks, it has an appealing vulnerability. Unfortunately, not enough to tug at the heartstrings of deep-sea trawlermen fishing off the Australian coast, for whom it’s just collateral damage.”

As it turns out, the truth lies elsewhere—in this case, the dark depths at 3,900 feet below the surface of the Tasman Sea.

“Hardly has a muscle, but doesn’t seem to mind.

It eats what floats into its mouth—crustaceans and some brine.”

Mr. Blobby was discovered during a joint Australian-New Zealand exploration of submarine habitats around Norfolk and Lord Howe islands. A team consisting of two dozen scientists spent four weeks on the RV *Tangaroa* sampling the fauna along the islands’ two long underwater mountain ranges.

The expedition photographer came upon a “very soft, very goopy fish, about the length of a comic book. While the ship swayed, the jiggly mass slid to and fro, even in death.”

an equal number of comedians to film short videos on their behalf. Paul Foot, the comic who championed the blobfish’s candidacy, maintained, “The sad face of the blobfish belies a kind and very wise little brain in there.”

So Mr. Blobby is a bit of a self-promoter. OK, a world-class self-promoter. In an “interview” on a museum-themed website, the blobfish boasts about predicting the winners of the FIFA World Cup and the Australian Master Chef competition, and reporting live from the red carpet of the Eureka Prizes—the country’s most prestigious science awards event. In a very real sense, the Creature From Deep-Down Under has demonstrated how museums can publicize their physical objects in a digital world.



McGruther tends to his collection of specimens at the Australian Museum.

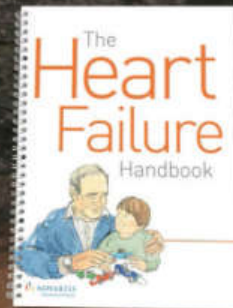


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NATURE CHARISMA

The ship towed trawling gear along the ocean floor, netting more than 100 new species of fish and invertebrates. Among the catch were corals, sea cucumbers, gulper eels, fangtooths, coffinfish, prickly dogfish, viperfish, slickheads, giant sea spiders and the fossilized tooth of an extinct megalodon—a shark many times the size of the great white. There were spookfish (part squid, part fountain pen), whose snouts were equipped with electrical receptors to detect hidden prey; sponges as tall as ten feet; and humpback anglerfish—also known as black devils—that use bacteria to emit light through the long stalks sprouting from their heads.

One day while surveying the *Tangaroa*'s recently departed, expedition photographer and marine ecologist Kerry Parkinson came upon what

Mark McGrouther describes as a “very soft, very goopy fish, about the length of a comic book. While the ship swayed, the jiggly mass slid to and fro, even in death.” Drooping from its lower lip—like the unlit cigarette that forever dangled from Humphrey Bogart’s—was a parasitic copepod. A blob within a blob.

Parkinson took a picture. “He looked so human!” she recalls. “He had that certain charisma that demands attention.”

The name Mr. Blobby derived not from the menacing slimeball in the 1958 horror film, but, according to some, the bulbous, pink and yellow polka-dotted bumbler—Britain’s answer to Barney—who once topped the *Independent*’s list of 10 most irritating television characters. “Personally, I doubt that explanation,” protests McGrouther. “I think it’s called Blobby because, out of the water, it’s a limp, flabby thing that can’t support its own weight. So it splodges.”

Blobfish belong to the fathead sculpin family, the piscine equivalent of the Addams Family. (Creepy and kooky, mysterious and spooky.) This

“altogether ooky” animal is found in the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian oceans at depths between 330 and 9,200 feet. Unlike most fish, they have no swim bladder to help maintain buoyancy. “If Mr. Blobby had an air sac, he would collapse under the extreme pressure,” McGrouther says. “Instead, he uses water as a structural support.” The blobfish’s blanchmange of a body is less dense than water, allowing it to drift passively above the seabed. Having realized long ago that activity does them no good, they tend to remain almost, if not entirely, still.

Like other lie-and-wait predators, blobfish stick around until anything remotely edible floats into their open jaws, then suck it in. Though food may be scarce in the deep and trawlers sometimes cast wide nets, McGrouther thinks it’s a stretch to say blobfish have been pushed to the brink: “The Tasman Sea is very big and deep-sea trawlers very few.” In an emphatic redundancy, he will add this: “Mr. Blobby is certainly dead.”

McGrouther reckons Mr. Blobby succumbed while surfacing, a victim of the dramatic change in water temperature. “His mashed facial features may have resulted from being stuck at the back of the net, squeezed between all sorts of other marine life. By the time he was dumped on the deck of the *Tangaroa* and exposed to the air, his skin had relaxed. He would have looked a good deal less blobby on the seafloor.”

Though the precise life expectancy of blobfish is unknown, deepwater fish generally tend to live longer than their shallow-water counterparts. Some stay alive for more than 100 years because of their lack of predators, and slow rate of growth and reproduction. How do blobfish mate? “Nobody knows,” McGrouther says. “I’d guess they lock in a clinging, rather conjugal embrace.” ➔



The yellowish blob on Blobby’s mouth is a parasitic copepod, a type of crustacean.

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Is a blobfish edible? “I’ve never spoken to anyone who’s tried to eat one. I suppose Mr. Blobby would taste like chicken. On the other hand, chicken may taste like Mr. Blobby.”

Considering that McGrouther decided not to dissect the Australian Museum’s most celebrated specimen, how can he be sure it isn’t Ms. Blobby? “It’s possible,” he says. “I could properly sex and ID him, but I like the fact that he’s the one-and-only Mr. Blobby.”

Mr. B got entangled in social media the same way he got snagged in a research net: by accident. In 2010, the blobfish was showcased on “The Gruen Transfer,” a popular Australian TV show about the advertising industry. In a segment that judged the best creative treatment for hard-sells, two agencies were challenged to fashion campaigns

mascot. Among the other contestants were a jumping slug, the world’s only parrot that can’t fly (the kakapo), a salamander that never grows up (the axolotl) and the Andean “scrotum” water frog. Residents of Lima make a frappe of this alleged aphrodisiac by skinning it and running it through a blender. Alas, few members of the UAPS electorate would vote for, much less touch, pubic lice, whose existence reportedly has been put at risk by bikini waxing.

McGrouther thinks the honor is undeserved. “That was a sacrilege, really unfair,” he says. “I used to have an ugly dog named Florence, a mongrel-looking thing. She was blind and had lost most of her hair and her mind, though never her appetite. Mr. Blobby is far more attractive than Florence.”

So attractive that a few years back the museum exhibited the blobfish in its own display case. Schoolchildren were encouraged to leave mash notes. The most memorable: “You remind me of my teacher.”

McGrouther says Mr. Blobby is part

until now no one has stood up for gob-faced squid or the hundreds of species that go extinct every day.”

Watt says humans tend to be partial to mammals and “narcissistic” in their attachment to nature. “We only care about animals that remind us of ourselves, or those we consider adorable,” says Watt, author of *The Ugly Animals: We Can’t All Be Pandas*. “We prefer big eyes, bushy tails and animals that have, at the very least, recognizable faces.”

He argues that though tigers and snow leopards hog all the attention in the fight to preserve species, the ugly ducklings—dull, unloved, neglected—play an equally important role in the ecological web. Consider the naked mole rat, which is nearly as repulsive as the blobfish. “Science has shown that the rats are pain resistant and unable to get cancer,” Watt says. “As a result of this find, cancer research for humans has edged forward, and the mole rat no longer looks quite so ugly.”

Told (gently) that that blobfish isn’t endangered after all, Watt lets out an audible sigh. “I’m pleased but sad,” says the evolutionary biologist. “Pleased because anything not endangered makes me happy, but sad because maybe the award should have gone to an animal like the Tonkin snub-nosed monkey, which is in dire straits and could use the press. But if the blobfish’s victory has made people aware that extinction is a wider problem, that’s all for the good.”

To the baby boomers, a generation once young and idealistic and which felt largely unappreciated, the baby harp seal and its huge pleading eyes symbolized a certain level of ecological awareness. With the aging of those innocents, the blobfish—inert, indolent, in a state of perpetual maritime melancholy—may be the new face of our relationship with nature, the planet, the future.

Mr. Blobby is a fish for a world gone soft in the head. ○

“We only care about animals that remind us of ourselves, or those we consider adorable. We prefer big eyes, bushy tails and animals that have, at the very least, recognizable faces.”

around “saving the blobfish.” Which is how the extinction rumor got started.

A Sydney firm gave Mr. Blobby a Photoshop makeover. Its opponent, from Brisbane, dispatched a chubby middle-aged man to the streets. Nude except for swim trunks and a strap-on nose only Pinocchio might covet, he blobbed through city squares, restaurants and bus stops brandishing two signs. One read: “How Would You Like It If I Trawled Your Bottom?”; the other promised, “50,000 Signatures and I Go Back to Where I Belong.”

Within a week, Mr. Blobby had 500 Facebook followers.

The blobfish’s cyber-profile got an even bigger boost in 2013 when it won the ugliest animal competition and became the preservation society’s official

of the museum’s permanent collection. “He’s not terribly at risk here,” the curator says. “We haven’t had bomb threats and no terrorist has demanded that we hand over Mr. Blobby. He’s quite comfortable in his little watery grave.”

... And yes it has a saddened look; perhaps it’s feeling down—

*For, thanks to fishing trawlers
Soon this fish won’t be around.*

The Ugly Animal Preservation Society asks why handsome, zoo display-worthy animals get the lion’s share of publicity, research, protective legislation, and public and private financial support. “People have always shouted ‘Save the Whale,’” says biologist Simon Watt, the organization’s president, “but



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ONE OF ITS MOST
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AND IS HE (OR SHE)
STILL OUT THERE?

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JONATHAN BARTLETT



London, May 17, 1985: Oleg Gordievsky

was at the pinnacle of his career. A skilled intelligence officer, he had been promoted a few months before to *rezident*, or chief, of the KGB station in the British capital. Moscow seemed to have no clue he'd been secretly working for MI6, the British secret intelligence service, for 11 years.

That Friday, Gordievsky received a cable ordering him to report to Moscow "urgently" to confirm his promotion and meet with the KGB's two highest officials. "Cold fear started to run down my back," he told me. "Because I knew it was a death sentence."

He'd been back at headquarters only four months earlier, and all seemed well. Now, he feared, the KGB's counterspies had become suspicious and were recalling him to confront him. If he refused the summons, he would destroy his career. But if he returned home, he could be shot.

His MI6 handlers assured him they'd picked up no sign anything was wrong. They urged him to go to Moscow, but they also provided him with an escape plan in case he signaled that he was in danger.

Gordievsky decided to risk his life and go.

Athens, May 21, 1985: After the Tuesday-morning staff meeting at the Soviet Embassy, Col. Sergei Ivanovich Bokhan stayed behind to talk to his boss, the local rezident of the GRU, the Soviet military intelligence agency.

As the deputy chief, Bokhan was privy to all GRU spy operations aimed at Greece, the United States and the other NATO countries. After they chatted for a while, the rezident said, "By the way, Sergei, this cable came in" and tossed it

over. It said Bokhan's son, Alex, 18, was having trouble in military school and suggested the deputy take his vacation now, three months early, and return to the Soviet Union to deal with him.

Bokhan froze. "Stay calm," he recalls telling himself. "*They know.*"

His boyhood nickname, back on a collective farm in Ukraine, was "Mole." Now a stocky, powerfully built man of 43, he had been working for the GRU for 16 years—and feeding Soviet secrets to the CIA for 10. He knew instantly that the cable was a ruse. Only a few days earlier he had called his brother-in-law in Kiev, where Alex was studying, and been assured his son was doing well.

Bokhan assumed that both the KGB and the GRU were watching him. He decided to leave Athens—but not for Moscow.

Moscow, August 3, 1985: It was 2 a.m. when Andrei Poleshchuk got home. The 23-year-old journalist had been working late for Novosti, the Soviet press agency. Through the windows of the ground-floor apartment he shared with his parents, he could see strangers moving about. A large man let him in and flashed a badge.

"Your father's been arrested," the man said. He would not say why.

Arrested? Impossible. His father, Leonid Poleshchuk, was a senior KGB counterintelligence officer, most recently the deputy rezident for counterintelligence in Lagos, Nigeria.

For months, Andrei had been hoping his father would find him an apartment. He had graduated from school and found a good job, and he wanted to live on his own. Housing in Moscow was nearly impossible to find, even for a KGB officer, but sometime that May, he'd received a seemingly miraculous letter from his father. It said his parents had unexpectedly heard of an apartment they could buy for him; his father decided to take his vacation early and come home to close the deal. Leonid and his wife, Lyudmila, had been back two weeks when the KGB showed up at their door.

"It was surreal, like a bad nightmare," Andrei told me. "I could not believe what was happening. I went into the bathroom, locked the door and stared at myself in the mirror."

The KGB men searched the apartment all night. "In the morning, they took us—my mother, my grandmother and me—and put us in separate black Volgas," Andrei said. They were driven to the infamous Lefortovo prison for interrogation.



I AM READY TO MEET
AT B ON 1 OCT.
I CANNOT READ
NORTH 13-19 SEPT.
IF YOU WILL
MEET AT B ON 1 OCT.
PLS SIGNAL NORTH 4
OF 20 SEPT TO CONFIRM
NO MESSAGE AT PIPE.
IF YOU CANNOT MEET
1 OCT, SIGNAL NORTH AFTER
27 SEPT WITH MESSAGE AT
PIPE.

Aldrich Ames' spying (above: a note recovered from his trash) led to his arrest (left). But his debriefing couldn't explain the loss of three major assets.

On that first day, Andrei pressed his questioners to explain why his father had been arrested. One of them finally answered: "For espionage."

The year 1985 was a catastrophe for U.S. and British intelligence agencies. In addition to Gordievsky, Bokhan and Poleshchuk, more than a dozen other sources were exposed. That fall, the KGB rolled up all of the CIA's assets in the Soviet Union in a lightning strike that sent the agency reeling. Ten agents were executed and countless others imprisoned.

Faced with these unexplained losses, the CIA in October 1986 set up a small, highly secret mole-hunting unit to uncover the cause of this disaster. With the arrest of Aldrich Ames in 1994, it seemed that the mole

hunters had found their quarry. When he began spying for the Russians almost a decade earlier, Ames was chief of the CIA's Soviet counterintelligence branch, entrusted with secrets that would be of incalculable value to the KGB. He was about to be married, and his debts were mounting.

After Ames was arrested and charged with espionage, his attorney, Plato Cacheris, negotiated a plea bargain with prosecutors: Ames' wife, Rosario, an accomplice in his spying, would be spared along prison sentence if he cooperated fully with the authorities. In extended CIA and FBI debriefings, he talked about his nine years of spying for Moscow—including the day when he turned over, in his words, the identities of "virtually all Soviet agents of the CIA and other American

and foreign services known to me."

That day was June 13, 1985, by Ames' account. In his fourth-floor office at CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia, he wrapped up five to seven pounds of secret documents and walked out of the building. He drove across the Potomac River to Washington, D.C. and entered Chadwicks, a popular Georgetown restaurant, where he handed the documents to a Soviet Embassy official named Sergei Chuvakhin. The agents he betrayed that day, he has said, included Oleg Gordievsky, whose CIA code name was GTTICKLE; Sergei Bokhan, or GT-BLIZZARD; and Leonid Poleshchuk, or GTWEIGH.

But the CIA and FBI debriefers soon recognized a glaring anomaly in Ames' account: It was clear that those three

agents had fallen under suspicion in May 1985—before Ames insists he handed over the documents.

“The timeline just didn’t work” to explain Gordievsky’s recall to Moscow, FBI Special Agent Leslie Wiser, who ran the Ames case, told me. “At least the timeline based on what Ames said when he was debriefed.... If it wasn’t Ames, then it was someone else, so we began to search for the source of the compromise,” Wiser said.

That raised a possibility that remains, even today, a subject of deep concern among counterintelligence agents, a problem privately acknowledged but little discussed publicly: That the three agents may have been betrayed by a mole inside U.S. intelligence whose identity is still unknown. The FBI declined to comment on whether the search Wiser began is continuing.

The mere belief that there’s another mole, whether correct or not, can cause chaos inside an intelligence agency. During the 1960s, a corrosive mole hunt led by James J. Angleton, the CIA’s counterintelligence chief, led to institutional paranoia, paralyzed operations aimed at the Soviet Union, and disrupted the lives of many innocent CIA officers who were fired or sidetracked in their careers. And yet to an intelligence agency, ignoring the possibility of a mole isn’t really an option, either. The stories of Oleg Gordievsky, Sergei Bokhan and Leonid Poleshchuk—reported here in extensive new detail and based on interviews with Gordievsky, Bokhan and Andrei Poleshchuk, as well as former FBI and CIA officials—suggest the damage a mole can do.

As soon as Gordievsky landed in Moscow, he picked up signs that he had gambled wrong. On the front door of his apartment, someone had locked a third lock he never used because he had lost the key; he had to break in. Clearly the KGB had searched his flat.

Some days passed before his boss, Viktor Grushko, drove him to a KGB dacha, saying some people wanted to talk to him. Gordievsky was served



sandwiches and Armenian brandy. The next thing he knew, he woke up half-dressed in one of the dacha’s bedrooms. He had been drugged. A KGB general told him he had confessed. “Confess again!” the general roared.

Gordievsky was taken home, but Grushko confronted him at the KGB the next day. “We know very well that you’ve been deceiving us for years,” he said. Gordievsky was told his London posting was over, but he would be allowed to remain in a non-sensitive KGB department in Moscow.

It was apparent that Soviet counterintelligence agents did not yet have enough evidence to arrest him. Gordievsky believes they were waiting to catch him contacting British intelligence. “They expected I would do

something stupid,” he told me. But it was only a matter of time. “Sooner or later they would arrest me.”

His escape plan was bound under the flyleaf of a novel; he had to slit the cover open to read the instructions. He was to stand on a certain Moscow street corner on a designated day and time until he saw a “British-looking” man who was eating something. He did so, but nothing happened. He tried again, following the fallback plan, and this time a man carrying a dark-green bag from Harrods, the upscale London department store, walked by eating a candy bar. It was the signal to launch his escape.

On the appointed day he started *proverka*, or “dry-cleaning”—walking an elaborate route to throw off anyone

who might be watching him. From a Moscow railroad station, he made his way by train, bus and taxi to a point near the Finnish-Soviet border, where he hid in some grass by the roadside until two cars stopped.

Inside were three British intelligence agents—the candy-bar man and two women, one of whom was Gordievsky's MI6 case officer in London. Although Gordievsky has written that he climbed into the trunk of one of the cars, a former CIA officer says he actually crawled into a space in a specially modified Land Rover. Had the Russians examined the car, they would have seen the hump on the floor where the driveshaft would normally be. But this Land Rover's driveshaft had been rerouted through one of the vehicle's doors, the former CIA officer says, so that Gordievsky could fold himself into the hump, in effect hiding in plain sight.

They drove through several checkpoints with no trouble, but they had to stop at Soviet customs when they

officer, Dick Reiser, who cabled headquarters in Langley that BLIZZARD was in trouble. Soon there was a plan for an "exfiltration," the CIA's term for spiriting an agent in danger out of a foreign country.

Five days after Bokhan received the cable about his son, he took his wife, Alla, and their 10-year-old daughter, Maria, to the beach. He had never told his wife that he was working for the CIA—it would have put her in mortal danger—but now he had to say something. As they walked on the beach that Saturday, he said his career was in trouble. Would she ever live in the West?

"What country?" Alla asked.

"It doesn't matter," he said, and quoted a Russian proverb: "*S milym rai i v shalashе*." If you love somebody, you will have heaven even in a tent.

"I don't want to live in a tent," she said.

He dropped it, sensing that he was getting into dangerous territory. They had a sumptuous lunch—Bokhan knew it might be his last meal with his family—

and people on the tarmac. He asked if they were there to greet an important diplomat. "No," he was told, "they're here for you."

He walked down the steps and shook hands with the waiting CIA officers.

"Welcome to the United States," one of them said.

After months of interrogation at Lefortovo, Andrei Poleshchuk told his captors he wouldn't answer any more questions unless they told him who his father worked for. "That's when they showed me a piece of paper with the words, 'I met Joe,'" Andrei told me. "It was in my father's handwriting." Leonid Poleshchuk knew his first CIA case officer, who had recruited him in Nepal, as Joe. "It was the KGB's way of saying my father worked for the CIA," Andrei said.

Before Leonid Poleshchuk left Lagos, he had asked the CIA for \$20,000 to buy the apartment that was supposedly waiting for him. The agency cautioned that it would be too risky for him to

IN HIS OFFICE AT CIA HEADQUARTERS IN LANGLEY, VIRGINIA, HE WRAPPED UP FIVE TO SEVEN POUNDS OF SECRET DOCUMENTS AND WALKED OUT OF THE BUILDING.

reached the border. When the driver turned off the engine, Gordievsky could hear dogs close by—Alsations, he later learned. Minutes passed. His fear mounted. He started having trouble breathing. The women fed the dogs potato chips to distract them. Then the car started up again, and the radio, which had been playing pop music, suddenly boomed out Sibelius' *Finlandia*. He was free.

In Athens, Bokhan called an emergency telephone number that rang in the CIA station inside the American Embassy. He asked for a fictitious Greek employee. "You have the wrong number," he was told.

The coded exchange triggered a meeting that night with his CIA case

and Maria bought a stuffed Greek doll called a patatuff. After they drove home, he packed a gym bag and announced that he was going for a jog. Then he kissed his wife and daughter goodbye.

He drove around Athens in his BMW for close to an hour to make certain he wasn't being followed, then walked into a 100-foot pedestrian tunnel under a highway. Reiser was waiting in a car at the other end. In the back seat were a jacket, hat and sunglasses. Bokhan put them on as Reiser drove to a safe house. After dark they left for a small airport, where Bokhan boarded a CIA plane. After stops in Madrid and Frankfurt, a military jet flew him across the Atlantic. At Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland he looked out the window and saw several black cars

bring that much cash through the airport and told him the money would be in Moscow, stashed inside a fake rock.

What neither the CIA nor Poleshchuk knew was that the "apartment" was a KGB operation. The Soviets had arranged for the apparent good news to reach his wife through a friend and former co-worker in Moscow, who wrote to her in Lagos. Poleshchuk was lured back to his fate.

Leonid never made it to the rock, his son said. A Russian TV documentary shows a shadowy figure picking it up, but Andrei said it is an actor, not his father.

In June 1986, Leonid was tried and, predictably, convicted. Andrei was allowed to visit him in prison only once, after he was sentenced to death. "At first I couldn't even recognize

him,” Andrei said. “He had lost a lot of weight. He was thin, pale and obviously sick. He was like a walking dead man. I could sense he had been tortured.” Leonid was executed on July 30. The KGB told Andrei his father’s remains were cremated and there would be no grave.

In the history of U.S. intelligence, only three major moles—men whose betrayals had lethal results—have been identified.

Before Ames, there was Edward Lee Howard, a CIA officer who had been slated to go to Moscow but was fired instead for drug use and petty theft. On September 21, 1985, Howard eluded FBI surveillance and escaped into the New Mexico desert with the help of his wife, Mary, and a pop-up dummy in his car’s passenger seat (a technique he had learned in CIA training). Just the day before, Moscow had announced that a Soviet defense researcher named Adolf G. Tolkachev had been

federal prison in Florence, Colorado.

U.S. counterintelligence agents have established that neither Howard nor Hanssen had access to the identities of all the American intelligence sources who were betrayed in 1985. So the discrepancy between Ames’ timeline and the exposure of Gordievsky, Bokhan and Poleshchuk remains unexplained.

In July 1994, Leslie Wiser, the FBI agent who unmasked Ames, flew to London to interview Gordievsky. The resettled spy told Wiser he was convinced Ames had betrayed him, but he confirmed that he had been abruptly summoned back to Moscow on May 17, 1985—almost four weeks before Ames said he named him to the KGB. From the day they talked, Wiser told me, “we believed it was important for us to consider the strong possibility that Gordievsky was compromised by someone within the U.S. intelligence community.”

Wiser acknowledges that Ames may have lied or been mistaken about

two or three double agents/dangles I provided in April ‘85, until June 13th.”

For those who are betrayed, the damage persists long after the initial shock passes. A few days after Oleg Gordievsky was recalled to Moscow, the KGB flew his wife, Leila, and their two daughters there, and he broke the unwelcome news that they would not be posted back to London. “When I came to Moscow, she left,” he says, taking the children with her on a vacation.

After Gordievsky escaped, a Soviet military tribunal sentenced him to death in absentia. He underwent a debriefing by MI6 and cooperated with it and other Western intelligence services. He traveled frequently, to the United States, Germany, France, New Zealand, Australia, South America and the Middle East. He met with British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and President Ronald Reagan, wrote a memoir and co-wrote a book on the KGB.

He always hoped Leila would join

**THE KGB TOOK HER TO A SANITARIUM, WHERE SHE WAS
DRUGGED AND INTERROGATED FURTHER.
“I WOULD NEVER, EVER SEE HER SMILE AGAIN.”**

arrested as a CIA spy. Inside the CIA, Howard was blamed for Tolkachev’s unmasking and subsequent execution, although Ames, too, had betrayed the researcher’s identity. (Howard, Russian authorities reported in 2002, died of a fall in his KGB dacha near Moscow. One news account said he had fallen down the stairs and broken his neck.)

After Ames, there was FBI agent Robert P. Hanssen, who was arrested in 2001. In spying for Moscow on and off over 22 years, Hanssen revealed dozens of secrets, including the eavesdropping tunnel the FBI had dug under the Soviet Embassy in Washington and the identities of two FBI sources within the embassy, who were also executed. Hanssen, who was convicted of espionage, is serving a life sentence in the supermax

the date—Ames has conceded that he drank heavily before his meetings with the KGB. But Ames always insisted to the FBI, the CIA and the Senate Intelligence Committee that he revealed no significant sources before his meeting at Chadwicks. In April 1985, he has said, he told a Soviet contact in Washington the names of two or three double agents who had approached the CIA but who were actually working for the KGB—“dangles,” in intelligence parlance. He did so, he said, to prove his bona fides as a potential KGB mole. In a letter to me from the federal prison in Allenwood, Pennsylvania, where he is serving a life sentence, Ames wrote: “I’m quite sure of my recollection that I gave the KGB no names of any other than the

him in England. She did, in 1991, but the strain caused by six years of separation proved too much to repair. By 1993 their marriage was over.

Sergei Bokhan was also separated from his family for six years. Within two weeks after his flight to the United States, he had a new name, a fake background, a Social Security number and a 9-millimeter Beretta. He stayed in safe houses in Virginia at first, then lived half a year in California to learn English, moved back East and consulted for the CIA and some U.S. companies.

When Bokhan escaped from Athens, the KGB hustled his wife back to Moscow, searched her apartment and began a series of interrogations. “For two years I went to Lefortovo two, three times a week,” Alla Bokhan told



Andrei Poleshchuk still wears the gold watch that served as a bond between his father, who was executed by the KGB, and his father's case officer at the CIA.

me. "We had neighbors that were very close. Everyone avoided me. If I was waiting for the elevator, they went down the stairs. I had no job. When I found a job, the KGB called and they fired me. That happened several times."

Finally, in 1991, with the KGB in disarray after its chief led the failed coup against Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, the authorities let Alla and her daughter leave. They flew to New York and, with help from the CIA and the FBI, were reunited with Sergei at a motel near John F. Kennedy International Airport. He had champagne and flowers waiting, a big basket of fruit, chocolates and a balloon. There were embraces, and everyone cried. Maria, then 16, was carrying the patatuff.

Bokhan's son, Alex, also made it to

the U.S., in 1995. He works as a computer programmer. For a long time he resented the impact of his father's CIA spying on his own life. "I was angry because I was dropped from military school and sent to the Army, far off, near Vladivostok," he said. "I was 18 years old." He sees that episode differently now. "After many years, I understood him. It's OK. To be dead or to be alive was the question for my dad. He didn't have a choice." Today, Sergei and Alla live quietly in the Sun Belt under his new identity.

Andrei Poleshchuk told me his father's arrest was a disaster for his mother. "It shortened her life," he said. "Soon after his arrest she collapsed psychologically. I will never forget the day when I got home and she was

singing songs, melodies, no words, and looking insane. Her eyes were empty. It was scary."

The KGB took her to a sanitarium, where she was drugged and interrogated further. After some months, she was released. But, he adds, "I would never, ever see her smile again." She died three years later, in 1988.

After his father was executed, Andrei kept working for Novosti. In 1988, he took a Moscow river cruise and met "a blond, blue-eyed and very beautiful" woman named Svetlana, who worked for an automotive magazine. They married in 1993, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and he worked for an independent newspaper in Moscow for a time. In 1997, Andrei and Svetlana emigrated to the United States. They have two children, and he works as an independent research analyst for business and government contractors in Northern Virginia.

Soon after they arrived in the United States, there was a ceremony honoring his father at a Russian Orthodox church in Washington. "Afterward, we drove to a home in Virginia for a reception, where I met Joe," Andrei told me in a conversation over lunch at a restaurant tucked away on a side street in Washington. Leonid's original case officer "blamed himself for years for letting my father down. Joe had become very close to my father and worried that some action by him, some error, had led to his betrayal."

Before his father left Lagos, Andrei said, he gave a gold watch to his CIA case officer at the time. "He asked it be given to Joe, with a message, 'Here is something from Leo.'" By the time Joe learned of the gift, Andrei said, his father had been arrested. "Joe said to his people, 'Keep the watch, I want to give it to his son.'" At a reception after the church ceremony, Joe gave Andrei the watch.

He was wearing it the day we met.

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SECRETS OF
AMERICAN
HISTORY

THE DEVIL'S TONGUE

THE TRUE
MOTIVES OF THE
STAR WITNESS AT
THE CENTER OF
THE **SALEM WITCH**
TRIALS IN 1692
REMAIN ONE
OF AMERICA'S
GREATEST SECRETS

BY STACY SCHIFF

ILLUSTRATION BY
SANDRA DIONISI



Few corners of American history have

been as exhaustively or insistently explored as the nine months during which the Massachusetts Bay Colony grappled with our deadliest witchcraft epidemic. Early in 1692, several young girls began to writhe and roar. They contorted violently; they complained of bites and pinches. They alternately interrupted sermons and fell mute, "their throats choked, their limbs wracked," an observer noted. After some hesitation, after much discussion, they were declared to be bewitched.

Their symptoms spread, initially within the community, ultimately well beyond its borders. In their distress the girls cried out against those they believed enchanted them; they could see their tormentors perfectly. Others followed suit, because they suffered the effects of witchcraft, or because they had observed it, often decades in the past. By early spring it was established not only that witches flew freely about Massachusetts, but that a diabolical conspiracy was afoot. It threatened to topple the church and subvert the country.

By the fall, somewhere between 144 and 185 witches and wizards had been named. Nineteen men and women had hanged. America's tiny reign of terror burned itself out by late September, though it would endure allegorically for centuries. We dust it off whenever we

overreach ideologically or prosecute overhastily, when prejudice rears its head or decency slips down the drain, when absolutism threatens to envelop us. As often as we have revisited Salem—on the page, on the stage and on the screen—we have failed to unpack a crucial mystery at the center of the crisis. How did the epidemic gather such speed, and how did it come to involve a satanic plot, a Massachusetts first? The answers to both questions lie in part with the unlikelyst of suspects, the Indian slave at the heart of the Salem mystery. Enigmatic to begin, she has grown more elusive over the years.

We know her only as Tituba. She belonged to Samuel Parris, the minister in whose household the witchcraft erupted; his daughter and niece were the first to convulse. Although she was officially charged with having practiced witchcraft on four Salem girls

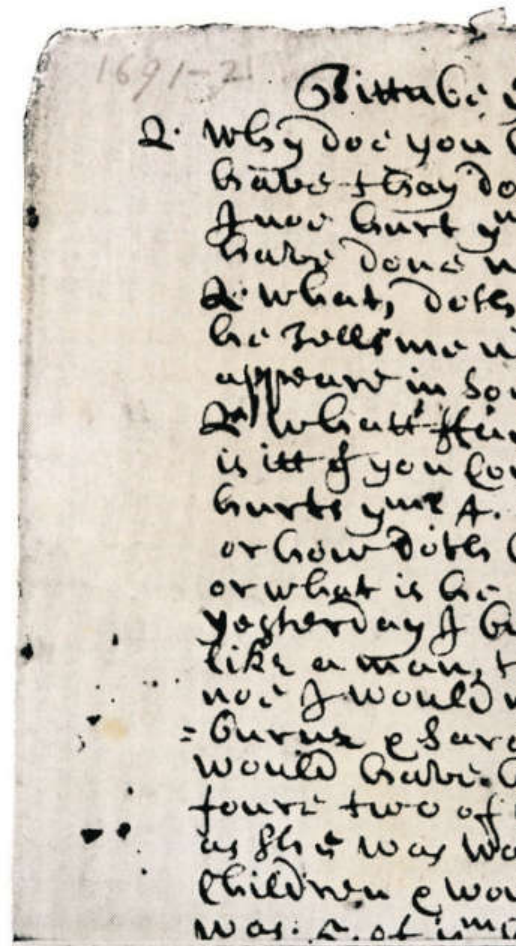
between January and March, we do not know precisely why Tituba was accused. Especially close to 9-year-old Betty Parris, she had worked and prayed alongside the family for years, for at least a decade in Boston and Salem. She took her meals with the girls, beside whom she likely slept at night. Tituba may have sailed from Barbados in 1680 with Parris, then still a bachelor and not yet a minister. Though likely a South American Indian, her origins are unclear.

She could not have expected to be accused. New England witches were traditionally marginals: outliers and deviants, cantankerous scolds and choleric foot-stompers. They were not people of color. Tituba does not appear to have been complicit in an early attempt to identify the village witches, a superstitious experiment performed in the parsonage while the adult Par-

ises were away. It infuriated the minister. She had never before appeared in court. At least some villagers assumed her to be the wife of a second Parris slave, an Indian named John. English was clearly not her first language. (To the question, "Why do you hurt these children?" Tituba responded, "I no hurt them at all.")

She was presumably not a large woman; she would expect the Salem justices to believe that two other suspects had strong-armed her into a high-speed excursion through the air, while all held close to one another on a pole. She was the first in Salem to mention a flight.

Along with those women, Tituba came before the authorities in Salem Village on March 1, 1692, to answer to witchcraft charges. The first two suspects denied all knowledge of sorcery. When Tituba met her interrogators



While she was hauntingly specific, she was also gloriously vague. Indeed she had glimpsed the diabolical book. But she could not say if it was large or small. The devil might have had white hair; perhaps he had not. While there were many marks in the book, she could not decipher names other than those of the two women already under arrest. Other confessors would not be so careful. Did she see the book? “No, he no let me see, but he tell me I should see them the next time,” she assured Hathorne. Could she at least say where the nine lived? “Yes, some in Boston and some here in this town, but he would not tell me who they were,” she replied. She had signed her pact with the devil in blood, but was unclear as to how that was accomplished. God barely figured in her testimony.

At a certain point she found that she could simply not continue. “I am blind now. I cannot see!” she wailed. The devil had incapacitated her, furious that Tituba liberally dispensed his secrets. There was every reason why the girls—who had howled and writhed through the earlier hearings—held stock still for that of an Indian slave. There was equal reason why Tituba afterward caused grown men to freeze in their tracks. Hours after her testimony, they trembled at “strange and unusual beasts,” diaphanous creatures that mutated before their eyes and melted into the night. And she would herself undergo a number of strange and unusual transformations, with the assistance of some of America’s foremost historians and men of letters.

Confessions to witchcraft were rare. Convincing, satisfying and the most kaleidoscopically colorful of the century, Tituba’s changed everything. It assured the authorities they were on the right track. Doubling the number of suspects, it stressed the urgency of the investigation. It introduced a dangerous recruiter into the proceedings. It encouraged the authorities to arrest additional suspects. A satanic conspiracy was afoot! Tituba had seen something of which every villager had heard and in which all believed: an ac-

tual pact with the devil. She had conversed with Satan but had also resisted some of his entreaties; she wished she had held him off entirely. She was deferential and cooperative. All would have turned out very differently had she been less accommodating.

Portions of her March account would soon fall away: The tall, white-

role. “And thus,” wrote a minister of her hypnotic account, “was this matter driven on.” Her revelations went viral; an oral culture in many ways resembles an Internet one. Once she had testified, diabolical books and witches’ meetings, flights and familiars were everywhere. Others among the accused adopted her imagery, some slav-



haired man from Boston would be replaced by a short, dark-haired man from Maine. (If she had a culprit in mind, we will never know who it was.) Her nine conspirators soon became 23 or 24, then 40, later 100, ultimately an eye-popping 500. According to one source, Tituba would retract every word of her sensational confession, into which she claimed her master had bullied her. By that time, arrests had spread across eastern Massachusetts on the strength of her March story, however. One pious woman would not concede witchcraft was at work: How could she say as much, she was asked, given Tituba’s confession? The woman hanged, denying—as did every 1692 victim—any part of sorcery to the end. All agreed on the primacy of Tituba’s

The pivotal accuser at the trials, Tituba would go down in history as a purveyor of satanic magic (an 1880s engraving depicts her in the act of terrifying children).

ishly. It is easier to borrow than invent a good story; one confessor changed her account to bring it closer in line with Tituba’s.

There would be less consensus afterward, particularly when it came to Tituba’s identity. Described as Indian no fewer than 15 times in the court papers, she went on to shift-shape herself. As scholars have noted, falling prey to a multi-century game of telephone, Tituba evolved over two centuries from Indian to half-Indian to half-black to black, with assists from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (who seemed to have plucked her from *Macbeth*),

historian George Bancroft and William Carlos Williams. By the time Arthur Miller wrote *The Crucible*, in 1952, Tituba was a “Negro slave.” She engaged in a different brand of dark arts: To go with her new heritage, Miller supplied a live frog, a kettle and chicken blood. He has Tituba sing her West Indian songs over a fire, in the forest, as naked girls dance around. Sounding like a distant cousin of Mammy in *Gone With the Wind*, she says things like: “Mister Reverend, I do believe somebody else be witchin’ these children.” She is last seen in a moonlit prison sounding half-crazed, begging the devil to carry her home to Barbados. After *The Crucible*, she would be known for her voodoo, of which there is not a shred of evidence, rather than for her psychedelic confession, which endures on paper.

Why the retrofitted racial identity? Arguably bias played a role: A black woman at the center of the story made more sense, in the same way that—as Tituba saw it—a man in black belonged

was thought that if she had feigned her confession, she could not have remembered her answers so exactly,” an observer explained later. A liar, it was understood, needed a better memory.

It seems the opposite is true: The liar sidesteps all inconsistencies. The truth-teller rarely tells his story the same way twice. With the right technique, you can pry answers out of anyone, though what you extract won’t necessarily be factual answers. Before an authority figure, a suggestible witness will reliably deliver planted or preposterous memories. In the longest criminal trial in American history—the California child abuse cases of the 1980s—children swore that daycare workers slaughtered elephants. Tituba’s details too grew more and more lush with each retelling, as forced confessions will. Whether she was coerced or whether she willingly collaborated, she gave her interrogators what she knew they wanted. One gets the sense of a servant taking her cues,

too deal in runaway accusations and point fingers in the wrong direction, as we have done after the Boston Marathon bombing or the 2012 University of Virginia rape case. We continue to favor the outlandish explanation over the simple one; we are more readily deceived by a great deception—by a hairy creature with wings and a female face—than by a modest one. When computers go down, it seems far more likely that they were hacked by a group of conspirators than that they simultaneously malfunctioned. A jet vanishes: It is more plausible that it was secreted away by a Middle Eastern country than that it might be sitting, in fragments, on the ocean floor. We like to lose ourselves in a cause, to ground our private hurts in public outrages. We do not like for others to refute our beliefs any more than we like for them to deny our hallucinations.

Having introduced flights and familiars into the proceedings, having delivered a tale that could not be

**SHE PROVED A BRILLIANT RACONTEUR....SHE WAS AS
UTTERLY CLEAR-MINDED AND COGENT AS ONE COULD BE
IN DESCRIBING TRANSLUCENT CATS.**

at the center of a diabolical conspiracy. Her history was written by men, working when African voodoo was more electrifying than outmoded English witchcraft. All wrote after the Civil War, when a slave was understood to be black. Miller believed Tituba had actively engaged in devil worship; he read her confession—and the 20th-century sources—at face value. By replacing the Salem justices as the villain of the piece, Tituba exonerated others, the Massachusetts elite most of all. In her testimony and her afterlife, preconceptions neatly shaped the tale: Tituba delivered on Hathorne’s leads as she knew her Scripture well. Her details tallied unerringly with the reports of the bewitched. Moreover, her account never wavered. “And it

dutifully assuming a pre-scripted role, telling her master precisely what he wants to hear—as she has from the time of Shakespeare or Molière.

If the spectral cats and diabolical compacts sound quaint, the trumped-up hysteria remains eminently modern. We are no less given to adrenalized overreactions, all the more easily transmitted with the click of a mouse. A 17th-century New Englander had reason for anxiety on many counts; he battled marauding Indians, encroaching neighbors, a deep spiritual insecurity. He felt physically, politically and morally besieged. And once an idea—or an identity—seeps into the groundwater it is difficult to rinse out. The memory is indelible, as would be the moral stain. We

unthought, Tituba was neither again questioned nor so much as named. She finally went on trial for having covenanted with the devil on May 9, 1693, after 15 harrowing months in prison. The jury declined to indict her. The first to confess to signing a diabolical pact, she would be the last suspect released. She appears to have left Massachusetts with whoever paid her jail fees. It is unlikely she ever saw the Parris family again. After 1692 no one again attended to her every word. She disappears from the record though did escape with her life, unlike the women she named as her confederates that March Tuesday. Tituba suffered only the indignity of a warped afterlife, for reasons she might have appreciated: It made for a better story. ○



SECRETS OF
AMERICAN
HISTORY

THE RESCUE MISSION

THE NATION'S
LARGEST PROBE INTO
THE LOOTING OF
NATIVE AMERICAN
HERITAGE NETTED
AN ASTONISHING
COLLECTION. HERE'S
AN EXCLUSIVE
FIRST LOOK

BY KATHLEEN SHARP

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
MARK LAITA

A petroglyph
(right) tenta-
tively dated to
between A.D.
900 and 1300
was among
some 40,000
items seized.





At dawn on June 10, 2009, almost 100

federal agents pulled up to eight homes in Blanding, Utah, wearing bulletproof vests and carrying side arms. An enormous cloud hung over the region, one of them recalled, blocking out the rising sun and casting an ominous glow over the Four Corners region, where the borders of Utah, Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico meet. At one hilltop residence, a team of a dozen agents banged on the door and arrested the owners—a well-respected doctor and his wife. Similar scenes played out across the Four Corners that morning as officers took an additional 21 men and women into custody. Later that day, the incumbent interior secretary and deputy U.S. attorney general, Ken Salazar and David W. Ogden, announced the arrests as part of “the nation’s largest investigation of archaeological and cultural artifact thefts.” The agents called it Operation Cerberus, after the three-headed hellhound of Greek mythology.

The search-and-seizures were the culmination of a multi-agency effort that spanned two and a half years. Agents enlisted a confidential informant and gave him money—more than \$330,000—to buy

illicit artifacts. Wearing a miniature camera embedded in a button of his shirt, he recorded 100 hours of videotape on which sellers and collectors casually discussed the prices and sources of their objects. The informant also accompanied diggers out to sites in remote canyons, including at least one that agents had rigged with motion-detecting cameras.

The haul from the raid was spectacular. In one suspect’s home, a team of 50 agents and archaeologists spent two days cataloging more than 5,000 artifacts, packing them into museum-quality storage boxes and loading those

boxes into five U-Haul trucks. At another house, investigators found some 4,000 pieces. They also discovered a display room behind a concealed door controlled by a trick lever. In all, they seized some 40,000 objects—a collection so big it now fills a 2,300-square-foot warehouse on the outskirts of Salt Lake City and spills into parts of the nearby Natural History Museum of Utah.

In some spots in the Four Corners, Operation Cerberus became one of the most polarizing events in memory. Legal limitations on removing artifacts from public and tribal (but not private) lands date back to the Antiquities Act of 1906,



Federal agents and archaeologists recovered a vessel (right) dating from A.D. 700 to 1400. A bowl (left) done in a style first seen around A.D. 1100 has “acid blooms” on its interior—imperfections suggesting that someone used modern soaps to clean the bowl up, possibly to fetch a higher price on the black market.



but a tradition of unfettered digging in some parts of the region began with the arrival of white settlers in the 19th century. Among the 28 modern Native American communities in the Four Corners, the raids seemed like a long-overdue attempt to crack down on a travesty against their lands and cultures—"How would you feel if a Native American dug up your grandmother and took her jewelry and clothes and sold them to the highest bidder?" Mark Mitchell, a former governor of the Pueblo of Tesuque, asked me. But some white residents felt that the raid was an example of federal overreach, and those feelings were inflamed when two of the suspects, including the doctor arrested in Blanding, committed suicide shortly after they were arrested. (A wrongful-death lawsuit filed by his widow is pending.) The prosecution's case was not helped when its confidential informant also committed suicide before anyone stood trial.

Ultimately, 32 people were pulled in, in Utah, New Mexico and Colorado. None of them were Native American, although one trader tried vainly to pass himself off as one. Twenty-four were charged with violating the federal Archaeological Resources Protection Act and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, among other laws. Two cases were dropped because of the suicides, and three were dismissed. No one went to prison. The remainder reached plea agreements and, as part of those deals, agreed to forfeit the artifacts confiscated in the raid.

The federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM), which has custody of the collection, spent the last five years simply creating an inventory of the items. "Nothing on this scale has ever been done before, not in terms of investigating the crimes, seizing the artifacts and organizing the collection," BLM spokeswoman Megan Crandall told me. Before they were seized, these objects had been held in secret, stashed in closets and under beds or locked away in basement museums. But no longer. Recently the



See clips from the *Cerberus* undercover videotapes at Smithsonian.com/tapes



A cradleboard (far left) was found with an umbilical pillow. Such pillows, which are extremely rare, disappeared from use around A.D. 400. A carved bird (top) originated with the Hohokam people, who may have traded for the shell with coastal tribes. An undated vessel (above) was given the shape of a duck's body.

BLM gave *Smithsonian* an exclusive first look at the objects it has cataloged.

Beyond the sheer size of the collection is its range: Some of the objects, such as projectile points and metates, or grinding stones, date to about 6,000 B.C. Among the more than 2,000 intact ceramic vessels, many appear to be from the Ancestral Puebloan people, or Anasazi, who lived on the Colorado Plateau for some ten centuries before they mysteriously departed around A.D. 1400. The Hohokam, who occupied parts of Arizona from A.D. 200 to 1450, are represented by shell pendants and ceramic bowls; the Mogollon, who thrived in northern Mexico and parts of Arizona and New Mexico from A.D. 300 to 1300, by pottery and painted arrow shafts. An undated sacred headdress belonged to the White Mountain Apaches, while a buffalo mask from the early 20th century is being returned to the Pueblo people in Taos. "You won't find some of these items anywhere else," said Kara Hurst, who was a curator of the BLM trove for three years until 2013, when she became supervisory registrar at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian. "We've heard *stories* about some of these objects. But not even Native Americans had seen some of these things before."

It's possible that no one will be able to see them outside the Cerberus collection, because archaeologists today rarely dig in the alcoves and cliff dwellings from which many items were taken. "There's no money to support legitimate excavations of alcoves today," said Laurie Webster, a research associate at the American Museum of Natural History who specializes in Southwestern perishable objects. "So you'll never be able to

Sandals made of fiber (right, top and bottom) are well-preserved. That may suggest they were taken from funerary sites, which Native Americans in the Four Corners find particularly disturbing. A group of arrows (far right) includes one with a metal bullet-like tip, suggesting it was made or altered in modern times.





excavate artifacts like these again.”

Many of the artifacts are remarkably well-preserved, even though they’re composed of delicate materials such as wood, hide and fiber. That’s partly a testament to the desert climate of the Four Corners—but also an indicator that at least some of the objects may have come from caves or other well-protected funerary sites, which has been a source of particular anguish to Native peoples. “The dead are never supposed to be disturbed. Ever,” Dan Simplicio, a Zuni and cultural specialist at Crow Canyon Archaeological Center in Cortez, Colorado, told me.

Roughly a quarter of the collection has high research potential, according to a preliminary survey by Webster. At the same time, the mass of objects is an archaeologist’s nightmare, because so many lack documentation of where and in what context they were found. “Stolen pieces usually don’t come with papers unless those papers are hot off the printer,” Crandall said.

In some cases, it’s not clear whether the relics are even genuine. Two human effigies, about six inches tall and made of corn stalk, yucca cordage and wood, are a case in point. One has an oversize erection, while the other has a dent between the legs. A dealer called them “fertility figures,” labeled them as from southeastern Utah, and dated them to about 200 B.C. to A.D. 400.

Webster had never seen any figures like them before, and she initially thought they were fakes. But on closer inspection she saw that the yucca cordage appears to be authentic and from somewhere between 200 B.C. and A.D. 400. Now, she believes the figures could be genuine—and would be of extreme cultural value. “This would be the earliest example of a fertility figure in this

region,” said Webster, earlier than the flute-playing deity Kokopelli, who did not appear until about A.D. 750. To investigate this artifact further, scholars will have to find their own research funds.

A multicolored ceramic bowl tells a more bittersweet tale. The exterior is the color of a flaming desert sunset, and the interior features bold geometric shapes and black and red lines; it is clearly in what archaeologists call the Salado style, a genre that appeared around A.D. 1100 and blended elements of Anasazi, Mogollon and Hohokam pottery. The piece was slightly marred by a few cracks, but more damaging are the “acid blooms” inside the bowl—evidence that someone used a contemporary soap to clean away centuries of dirt. The idea is that restored or “clean” vessels will fetch more money on the black market, said Nancy Mahaney, a BLM curator. “It’s been very interesting to work with the collection, because you can see the extent to which people will go to gain financially.”

With its inventory done, the BLM will give priority to returning whatever objects it can to the tribes from which they were taken. Even though the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act has highly specific guidelines for repatriating artifacts, several experts in the Native American community said the process will be complicated by the lack of documentation.

Once the BLM’s repatriation effort is complete, which will take several more years, the agency will have to find homes for the artifacts that remain. It hopes to form partnerships with museums that can both display the artifacts and offer opportunities for scholars to research them. “Part of our hope is that we will form partnerships with Native American communities, especially those that have museums,” said Mahaney. The Navajo have a large museum, while the Zuni, Hopi and others have cultural centers. Blanding, Utah, where several of the convicted looters live, has the Edge of the Cedars State Park Museum. Even so, it will take years of study before the Cerberus collection begins to yield its secrets. ○

Many of the Cerberus objects lack documentation of when and where they were collected. A dealer labeled a pair of effigies (right) as fertility figures from 200 B.C. to A.D. 400. One expert thought they were fake—until she took a second look. Now she says they may be the earliest such figures ever found in the Four Corners.





SECRETS OF

AMERICAN

HISTORY



THE HORSE THIEF

ILLUSTRATION BY

CHRIS BUZELLI

GEORGE ARMSTRONG
CUSTER'S **HEIST OF**
A HIGHLY PRIZED
STALLION—REVEALED

HERE FOR THE
FIRST TIME AFTER
150 YEARS—SHEDS
NEW LIGHT ON THE
“BOY GENERAL”

BY T.J. STILES

On April 25, 1865, a man named Junius Garland watched

a group of Union cavalrymen ride out of the woods near Clarksville, Virginia, and approach. Garland, a skilled groom, tended to a beautiful thoroughbred stallion: more than 15 hands high; solid bay with black legs, mane and pert tail; and a proud, erect head. That's Don Juan, the soldiers said, referring to the horse. We've been looking for him for days.

Garland was illiterate, having spent his life in slavery, but he wasn't stupid. He had been Don Juan's groom for the past few years, and he knew the horse's value. In the days following Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House, word had spread that Union troops were seizing good horses. Garland had hidden Don Juan at a farm in the woods on behalf of its owners, but another freedman told the soldiers where to find it.

The troopers harnessed Don Juan to a sulky, a light two-wheeled cart with little more than a driver's seat. They demanded one more thing: Don Juan's pedigree, printed in a handbill. They took it and drove the horse away.

Two weeks later, Dr. C.W.P. Brock visited the camp of the 3rd Cavalry Division, about five miles from Richmond. His horse had been impounded, too, and he went to see the division commander, Maj. Gen. George A. Custer, to ask for it. Custer received him, but he was distracted, excited. Have you heard of Don Juan? he asked Brock. Have you ever seen him? Brock said he only knew the animal's reputation as "a thoroughbred race horse." Custer and an unnamed lieutenant took Brock to a stable to see the famous stallion, which was "being curried down," Brock recalled. "Gen. Custer said that that was the horse, that he had him, and that he also had his pedigree."

For 150 years, it has been public knowledge that Custer owned Don Juan, but not how he acquired it. His many biographers have written that Union troops seized it during a wartime campaign, as they con-

fiscated every horse in Rebel territory; that was Custer's own explanation. Until now, the truth has remained hidden in the open, told in correspondence and affidavits archived in the library of the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument and the National Archives that have aroused little curiosity among those biographers. But the truth raises important questions about the man and his place in American history.

And 16 days after Lee's surrender, ten days after Lincoln's death by assassination, with all fighting at an end east of the Mississippi River, George Armstrong Custer stole a horse.

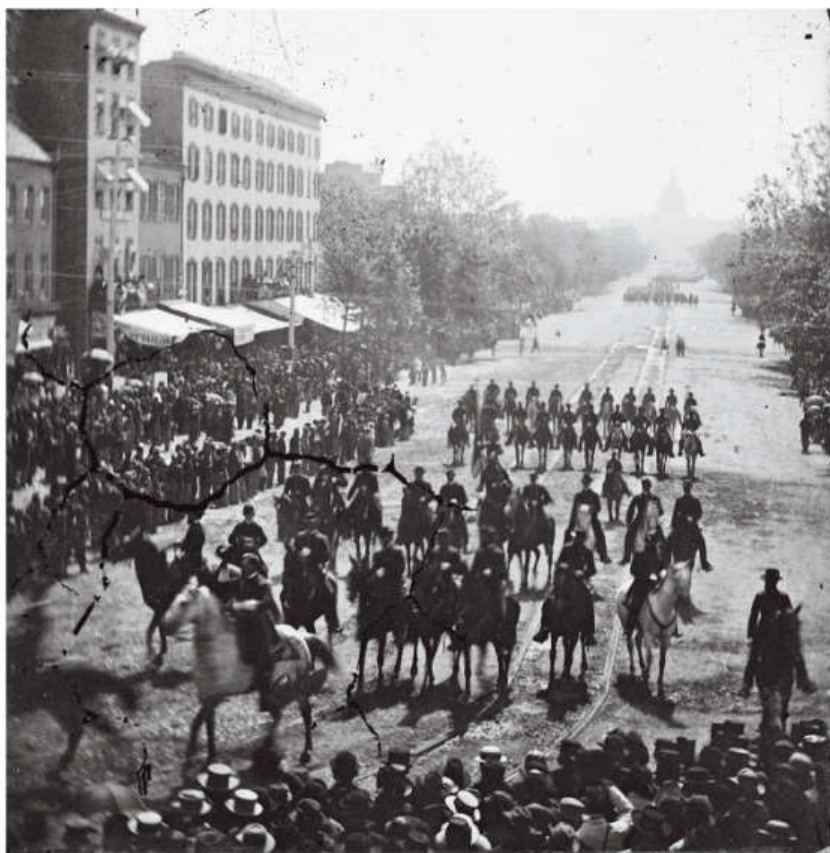
During the Civil War, Custer had fought courageously and commanded skillfully—but now, with the war over, he used his military authority to take what was not his, for no official purpose. Was it greed that corrupted him? A passion for fine horseflesh—common to most Americans in 1865, but particularly intense in this cavalryman? Was

it power—the fact that he could take it? As the military historian John Keegan memorably wrote, "Generalship is bad for people." Custer was only 25, an age more commonly associated with selfishness than self-reflection, and perhaps that explains it. But the theft was not impulsive. It had required investigation, planning and henchmen. It may help explain his self-destructive actions in the months and years that followed.

More than that, the story of Don Juan reveals a glimpse of Custer as a very different figure from the familiar Western soldier on a dead-end march to the Little Bighorn—different even from the Boy General of the Civil War, whose success as a Union cavalry commander was exceeded only by his flamboyance. It shows him as a man on a frontier in time, living on the crest of a great transformation of American society. In the Civil War and its aftermath, the nation we know today began to emerge, hotly disputed but clearly recognizable, with a corporate economy, industrial tech-

nology, national media, strong central government and civil rights laws. It supplanted an earlier America that was more romantic, individualistic and informal—and had enslaved some four million people based on their race. Custer pushed this change forward in every aspect of his surprisingly diverse career, yet he never adapted to the very modernity he helped to create. This was the secret to his contemporary fame and notoriety. His fellow citizens were divided and ambivalent over the destruction and remaking of their world; to them, Custer represented the Republic's youth, the nation as it had been and never would be again. Like much of the public, he held to old virtues but thrilled to new possibilities. Yet whenever he tried to capitalize on the new America, he failed—beginning with a stolen horse named Don Juan.

Don Juan's debut with Custer in the saddle stands as an iconic moment in his life, for it was his apotheosis as a



Custer graduated last in the West Point class of 1861, but within four years (left, the Grand Review, 1865), he had risen to brigadier general.

broidered with the names of victories, rose on wooden staffs, a moving grove of memory. As the procession wound around the north side of the Capitol, it passed by thousands of schoolchildren who burst into song—the girls in white dresses, the boys in blue jackets. Down the wide avenue the horsemen rode, shoulder to shoulder, curb to curb.

Custer led them. His sword rested loosely on his lap and over his left arm, with which he held the reins. His horse seemed “restive and, at times, ungovernable,” noted a reporter for the *Chicago Tribune*. It was Don Juan, the powerful, beautiful, stolen stallion. Custer had had only a month with the horse, which had been raised solely to sprint down a track and to mate. Neither capacity particularly suited it to the cacophony and distractions of the Grand Review.

The crowd roared for Custer—the champion, the hero, gallantry incar-

A SIMPLER EXPLANATION FOR DON JUAN'S FLIGHT WAS THE FACT THAT IT WAS ANOTHER MAN'S PROPERTY, ILL AT EASE WITH A STRANGE HAND ON THE REINS.

national hero. But as with so many of Custer's iconic moments, controversy envelops it, for all the wrong reasons. It came during the two-day Grand Review, the Union armies' triumphal march through Washington, D.C. to celebrate their victory in the Civil War. Beginning on May 23, tens of thousands of spectators crowded toward Pennsylvania Avenue for the great parade. A reviewing stand had been constructed at the White House for the commanding generals, key senators and congressmen (including Custer's sponsor, Senator Zachariah Chandler), foreign diplomats and Lincoln's successor, President Andrew Johnson. Flags and bunting hung everywhere. The Capitol displayed a huge banner reading, “The only national debt we

cannot pay is the debt we owe to the victorious Union soldiers.”

The first day of the parade belonged to the Army of the Potomac. The legions of veterans formed up east of the Capitol, the men dressed as they had in the field, though now they were clean and tidy. Custer wore his wide-brimmed slouch hat over his long curly hair and the proper uniform of a major general. Sometime after nine o'clock in the morning the procession started. Gen. George G. Meade led the way, followed by the general staff and the leadership of the Cavalry Corps. The march of units began, led by the 3rd Cavalry Division, each man in a red necktie.

Bands marched ahead of each brigade, filling the air with brass notes. Battle flags, tattered by bullets, em-

nate. Women threw him flowers. As he approached the reviewing stand, a young lady hurled a wreath of blossoms at him. He caught it with his free hand—and Don Juan panicked. “His charger took fright, reared, plunged and dashed away with his rider at an almost break-neck speed,” a reporter wrote. Custer's hat flew off. His sword clattered to the street. “The whole affair was witnessed by thousands of spectators, who were enchaind breathlessly by the thrilling event, and, for a time, the perilous position of the brave officer,” the *Tribune* reported. He held the wreath in his right hand as he fought for control with the reins in his left. Finally he yanked Don Juan to a halt, “to the great relief of the excited audience, who gave the gallant general three cheers,” the *New*

York Tribune's reporter wrote. "As he rode back to the head of his column," the *Chicago Tribune* reported, "round upon round of hearty applause greeted him, the reviewing officers joining in."

To the *Harrisburg Weekly Patriot & Union*, the incident said something about the mismatch of the man and the times. His ride on the runaway horse was "like the charge of a Sioux chieftain," the newspaper stated. The cheers when he regained control were "the involuntary homage of the every-day heart to the man of romance. Gen. Custer [sic] should have lived in a less sordid age."

It was a splendid display of horsemanship, but also an embarrassing break in decorum. An orderly had to fetch his hat and sword off the street. A suspicion arose that Custer had staged the incident to attract attention and win the crowd's approval; some claimed that such an excellent horseman would never have lost control of his mount in a simple parade. But such arguments miss another, simpler explanation for Don Juan's flight—the fact that it was another man's property, ill at ease with a strange hand on the reins. Custer sat astride his sin, and it had nearly proved too much for him.

"A man who lies to himself is often the first to take offense," Dostoevsky wrote in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Lying to oneself is a nearly universal human trait, to one degree or another. But some consciousness of the truth usually lurks; reminders make the liar brittle and defensive.

Richard Gaines pursued Custer's lie with the truth. He was the principal owner of Don Juan. A resident of Charlotte County, Virginia, he had purchased the horse for \$800 in 1860 and taken great care of it through the hard years of war, and now estimated its value at \$10,000. The very day of the Grand Review, Gaines took affidavits from himself, former slave Junius Garland and Dr. C.W.P. Brock to the War Department, which was receptive. "The government stalls here were unsuccessfully searched,"

the *Washington Star* reported, "and the man finally ascertained that his horse had gone to New Orleans with the General. The disconsolate owner follows immediately."

Custer could follow his pursuer's progress in the newspapers, which traced the hunt for the famous Don Juan. He had left the horse in his adopted hometown of Monroe, Michigan, where it was safe for the time being. Technically it still belonged to the Army, but Custer arranged for a board of officers to assess its value at \$125, which he paid on July 1, 1865. And he began to claim that the horse had been captured during one of Gen. Philip Sheridan's cavalry raids. "I expected the former owner would make an effort to recover the horse, he being so valuable," Custer wrote to his father-in-law, Judge Daniel Bacon. "He is the most valuable horse ever introduced into Mich . . . I hope to get (\$10,000) ten thousand for him." He asked Bacon not to mention the absurdly low purchase price and added that he had "a complete history of the horse."

He didn't explain how he would happen to have the pedigree if he had captured Don Juan in the midst of a campaign. It was a conundrum. The pedigree was key to the sale price—Custer's one great chance at profiting from the war. But his possession of it undermined his alibi; it implicated him in precisely the theft the owner alleged.

Custer had gone to Monroe immediately after the Grand Review, together with his wife, Libbie, and Eliza Brown, who had escaped slavery and become their cook and household manager. They soon departed for Louisiana. As June turned into July, they lingered in the town of Alexandria, where Custer organized a cavalry division for a march into Texas, still unoccupied by Union troops. All the while Gaines pressed his claim to Don Juan. The matter rose to the attention of General-in-Chief Ulysses S. Grant, who sent a direct order to Sheridan that Custer must deliver up the horse. But Sheridan put him off, repeating Custer's defense. "At the time the horse was taken I had given

orders to take horses wherever found in the country through which I was then passing," Sheridan told Grant. "If this horse is returned so should every horse taken be returned." Sheridan relied on Custer more than on any other subordinate; he may have accepted the alibi without question, or he may have backed Custer to protect him, right or wrong. Whatever he thought, he did not try to determine the truth. As the pressure mounted, Custer's protector was now implicated in his lie.

It may be no coincidence that Custer's weeks in Louisiana and his march into Texas marked a period of failure as a commander. He led five regiments of troops who had never served under him in combat—volunteers who wished to go home, now that the war was over, and resented being kept under arms. Still worse, the Army's supply system failed, delivering almost inedible rations, such as hogs' jowls complete with teeth and vermin-infested hardtack. Eager to placate Southern civilians, Custer attempted to suppress foraging by his troops through such punishments as flogging and head-shaving, and put one officer through a mock execution after the man circulated a petition complaining about his regimental commander. Rumors circulated of assassination plots by his men. Grant ordered Sheridan to dismiss Custer, but again Sheridan shielded his protégé. Custer even had to put down a mutiny by homesick troops in the 3rd Michigan Cavalry, which was kept in service as other volunteer regiments disbanded.

On January 27, 1866, with the Texas operation winding down, Custer received orders to report to Washington. Mustered out of the U.S. Volunteers, the temporary force created for the duration of the Civil War, he reverted to his permanent Regular Army rank of captain and returned to the East.

With the future in doubt, Custer went to New York as his wife tended to her ailing father in Michigan. He lodged at the Fifth Avenue Hotel, a vast edifice opposite Madison Square with a



Custer (in Virginia in 1862) began his ascent on the Peninsula Campaign, when he led an attack that resulted in the taking of 50 Rebel prisoners.

with its reputation for disloyalty. And like Custer, they strongly supported President Johnson, who opposed any attempt to extend citizenship and civil rights to African-Americans.

“Oh, these New York people are so kind to me,” Custer wrote to Libbie. Barlow invited him to a reception at his house one Sunday evening, where he mingled with Paul Morphy, the great chess prodigy of the era, along with rich and famous men. “I would like to become wealthy in order to make my permanent home here. They say I must not leave the army until I am ready to settle here.”

Custer’s words contradict his image as a man of the frontier. He had that peculiar susceptibility of the rural, Midwestern, ambitious boy for the cosmopolitan center, for the culture and intensity of New York—especially when it welcomed him. He saw himself depicted in a painting of Union war

**THE CLAIRVOYANT ALSO SAID, CUSTER REPORTED,
“I WAS ALWAYS FORTUNATE SINCE THE HOUR OF MY
BIRTH AND ALWAYS WOULD BE.”**

staff of 400—“a larger and handsomer building than Buckingham Palace,” as the *London Times* called it in 1860. It pioneered such innovations as private bathrooms and the passenger elevator. He told Libbie that he socialized with Senator Chandler and his wife, visited the actress Maggie Mitchell, looked at paintings, attended the theater, shopped at A.T. Stewart’s famous department store “and enjoyed a drive on the Harlem Lane and the famous Bloomingdale Road,” the broad thoroughfares of rural upper Manhattan where Cornelius Vanderbilt and other wealthy men raced their expensive trotting horses.

The politically influential men of Wall Street cultivated Custer. They

took him to eat at the Manhattan Club, for example. Located in a palatial building on Fifth Avenue at 15th Street, its rooms decorated with marble and hardwood paneling, the club was organized in 1865 by a group of Democratic financiers, including August Belmont and Samuel L.M. Barlow, Augustus Schell and Schell’s partner Horace Clark—Vanderbilt’s son-in-law and a former congressman who had opposed the expansion of slavery into Kansas before the war. The Manhattan Club served as headquarters for this faction of wealthy “silk-stocking” Democrats, who battled William Tweed for control of Tammany Hall, the organization that dominated the city. They provided national leadership for a party struggling

heroes. Escorted to Wall Street, he attended a session of the stock exchange. The brokers gave him six cheers, and he made a few remarks from the president’s chair. His new friends hosted a breakfast for him that included the lawyer and Democratic leader Charles O’Conor, the poet William Cullen Bryant and the historian and diplomat George Bancroft. At the home of John Jacob Astor III he socialized with Gen. Alfred Pleasonton, the Union cavalry commander who had secured Custer’s promotion at the age of 23 to brigadier general of volunteers. And he almost certainly visited George McClellan, the controversial former general and Democratic presidential candidate, whom

CONTINUED ON PAGE 84

Skyfall

When U-2 pilot Gary Powers was shot down, cold war tensions reached new heights

As he floated to earth, parachuting toward the vast Russian steppe on the morning of May 1, 1960, American U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers envisioned the “tortures and unknown horrors” awaiting him in a Soviet prison. He debated whether to use his suicide device—a poison-laced injection pin—hidden in a silver dollar coin and suspended, as he later described it, like “a good luck charm” around his neck.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower was relaxing at his mountain retreat, Camp David, when he learned that a U-2 “Dragon Lady” spy plane had gone missing. The subsequent news—that it had been shot down over Russia—came as a devastating blow. Eisenhower had been relying on the CIA’s top-secret

overflights to map suspected Soviet missile sites. The shootdown jeopardized a long-planned summit with Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev in Paris, scheduled to begin May 16.

Thus began a sequence of fateful decisions, miscalculations and blunders that set in motion one of the tensest periods of the cold war—and serves as the backdrop to the new Steven Spielberg film, *Bridge of Spies*, which recounts the effort to negotiate Powers’ release. Many artifacts associated with Powers’ mission, including a rug from his prison cell and the journal he kept during much of his nearly 21-month imprisonment (above right), are on display at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum.

Eisenhower had authorized high-altitude reconnaissance flights over enemy territory on the understanding that the Soviets would never get hold of a “live pilot.” His aides assured him that the plane would virtually disintegrate before it hit the ground.

Confident that the evidence had been destroyed, the president approved a cover story claiming that a civilian “weather plane” had gone missing over Turkey. He was stunned one week later when Khrushchev disclosed that the U-2 pilot was “alive and kicking.” Remnants of the plane were exhibited in Moscow’s Gorky Park.

“Downed Pilot Alive,” blared a *Los Angeles Times* headline describing Khrushchev’s announcement before the Supreme Soviet. Although Khrushchev traveled to Paris for the summit, the Russian leader canceled the meeting when the president refused to apologize.

The human back story to this drama is reflected in the journal kept by the 31-year-old Powers, at the suggestion of his cellmate, a Latvian political prisoner, Zigurd Kruminsh. (Although sometimes described as a secret journal, the diary likely was known to the Soviets: The blank notebook was in a packet delivered to Powers by the American Embassy.) The diary, donated to the museum by the Powers family, opens with a detailed description of the U-2 shootdown. A Soviet SA-2 missile exploded near the spy plane as it cruised at 70,000 feet, over the Ural Mountains near the city of Sverdlovsk, ripping off both wings.

“Good Lord, I’ve had it now,” Powers screamed to himself, he recalled in the journal, as the plane spun out of control—“in an upside down position with the nose pointing at the sky.” After ejecting and parachuting into a field, he was captured by Russian farmers as soon as he hit the ground.

Powers later said that he received virtually no training for such an eventuality, and only minimal instructions on how to behave under interrogation. He testified at his Moscow show trial that it was “more or less up to me whether to use” the suicide pin, issued by the CIA “in case I was captured, [and] would rather be dead.”

by Michael Dobbs

PHOTOGRAPH BY Anthony Cotsifas



FROM THE
SMITHSONIAN
NATIONAL AIR AND
SPACE MUSEUM

The journal provides a glimpse into the state of mind of perhaps the most high-profile prisoner of the entire cold war, chronicling his anguish over his unfaithful, alcoholic wife, Barbara Gay Powers. (The Soviets allowed her a conjugal visit, which she would recount in her memoir, *Spy Wife*—“I was swallowed up by our passion.”)

The pilot also expressed his doubts about U.S. foreign policy, and his desperate hopes for early release. In his cramped hand, Powers talks about becoming “a nervous wreck,” kept sane in part by Kruminsh, “one of the finest people I have ever known.”

Based on extensive research, the pilot's son, Francis Gary Powers Jr., now believes that Kruminsh was probably “a plant,” assigned by the KGB to keep an eye on his fellow prisoner. He also thinks that his father was subjected to intense “psychological pressure.” “He was not tortured,” says Powers Jr., founder and chairman emeritus of the Cold War Museum in Warrenton,

True Story?

History Film Forum:
Secrets of American History
explores how movies capture the past



History has never been hotter in Hollywood. And now a program at the National Museum of American History will screen upcoming films, including Ron Howard's *In the Heart of the Sea* and Matthew McConaughey's *Free State of Jones*, as well as controversial vintage works, such as *The Birth of a Nation*, to examine the dilemmas of portraying the past on the big screen. November 19 to 22. HistoryFilmForum.si.edu

Virginia. “But there were bright spotlights, grueling questions, sleep deprivation, threats of death.”

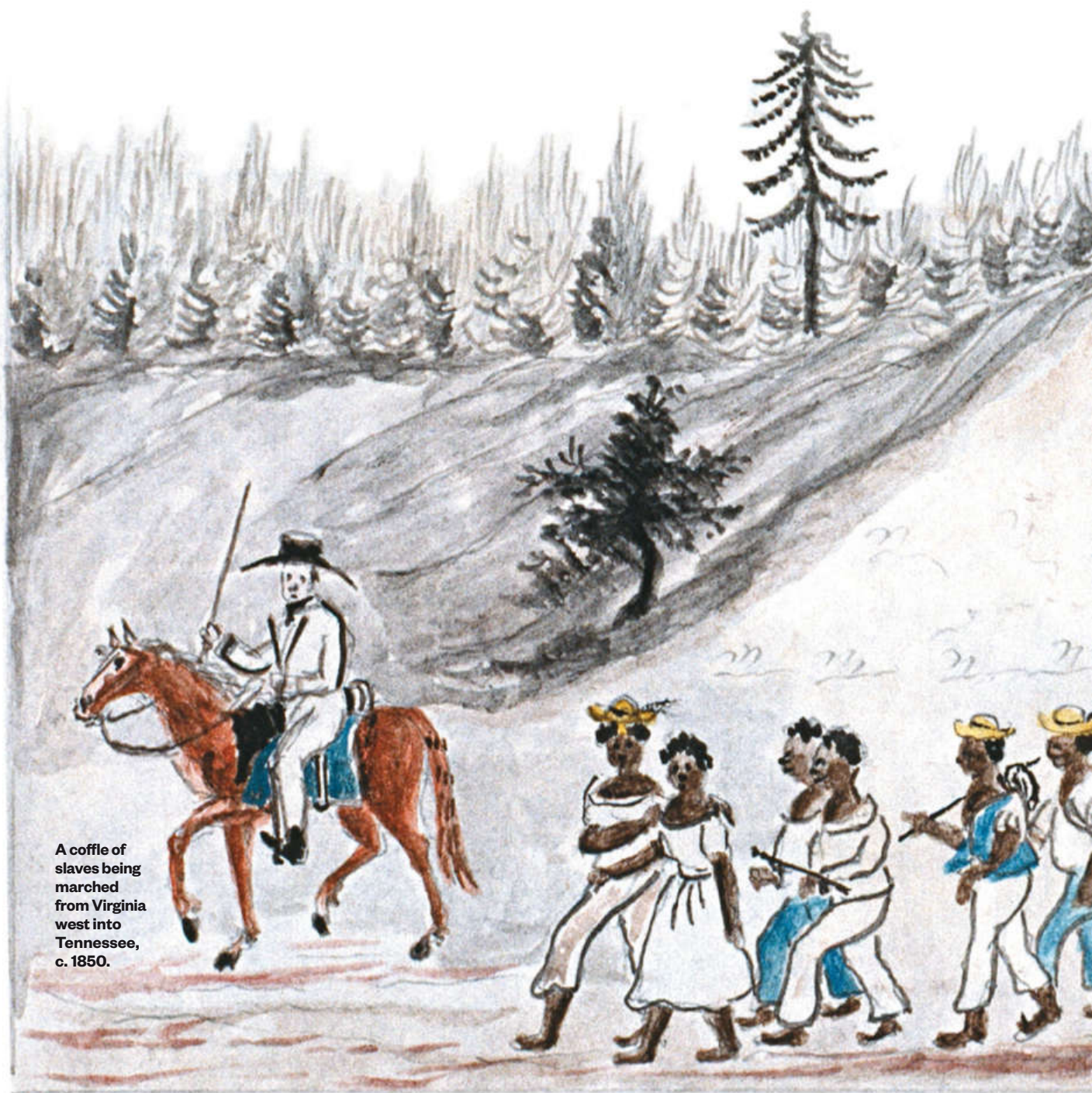
On February 10, 1962, Powers was exchanged in Berlin for a Soviet spy, Rudolf Abel, on Glienicke Bridge, the site central to the Spielberg film.

Powers returned home to criticism that he should have activated his suicide pin rather than be captured; a Congressional hearing in March 1962 exonerated him. He divorced in January 1963. As a civilian, he began test-flying U-2s for Lockheed. Later, he piloted traffic-reporting helicopters for a Los Angeles TV station. Powers died on the job in August 1977, when his aircraft, which had a faulty gauge history, ran out of fuel and crashed.

It took Powers' family many years to refute the allegation that the pilot had a duty to kill himself. In 2012, the Air Force posthumously awarded the Silver Star Medal for Powers' demonstration of “exceptional loyalty” to his country during his captivity.



SECRETS OF
AMERICAN
HISTORY

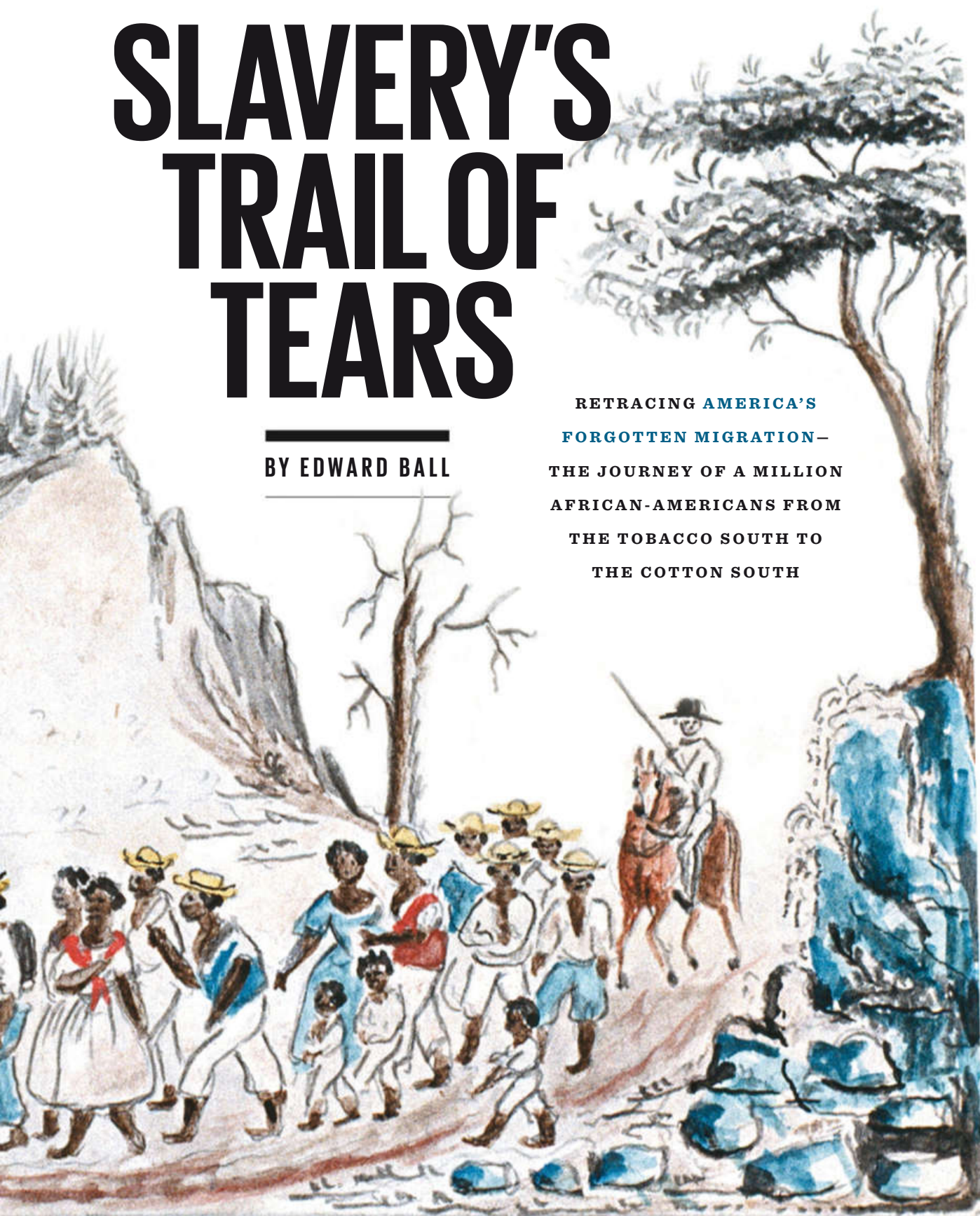


A coffle of
slaves being
marched
from Virginia
west into
Tennessee,
c. 1850.

SLAVERY'S TRAIL OF TEARS

BY EDWARD BALL

RETRACING **AMERICA'S**
FORGOTTEN MIGRATION—
THE JOURNEY OF A MILLION
AFRICAN-AMERICANS FROM
THE TOBACCO SOUTH TO
THE COTTON SOUTH



When Delores McQuinn was growing up, her father told her a story about a search for the family's roots.

He said his own father knew the name of the people who had enslaved their family in Virginia, knew where they lived—in the same house and on the same land—in Hanover County, among the rumpled hills north of Richmond.

"My grandfather went to the folks who had owned our family and asked, 'Do you have any documentation about our history during the slave days? We would like to see it, if possible.' The man at the door, who I have to assume was from the slaveholding side, said, 'Sure, we'll give it to you.'

"The man went into his house and came back out with some papers in his hands. Now, whether the papers were trivial or actual plantation records, who knows? But he stood in the door, in front of my grandfather, and lit a match to the papers. 'You want your history?' he said. 'Here it is.' Watching the things burn. 'Take the ashes and get off my land.'

"The intent was to keep that history buried," McQuinn says today. "And I think something like that has happened over and again, symbolically."

McQuinn was raised in Richmond, the capital of Virginia and the former

with Armfield based in Alexandria and Isaac Franklin in New Orleans, the two became the undisputed tycoons of the domestic slave trade, with an economic impact that is hard to overstate. In 1832, for example, 5 percent of all the commercial credit available through the Second Bank of the United States had been extended to their firm.

This letter from 1834 held riches, and "I will bring them out by land" was, for me, the invaluable line: It referred to a forced march overland from the fields of Virginia to the slave auctions in Natchez and New Orleans. The letter was the first sign that I might be able to trace the route of one of the Franklin & Armfield caravans.

With that signal from Natchez, Armfield began vacuuming up people from the Virginia countryside. The partners employed stringers—headhunters who worked on commission—collecting enslaved people up and down the East Coast, knocking on doors, asking tobacco and rice planters whether they would sell. Many slaveholders were inclined to do so, as their plantations made smaller fortunes than many princeling sons would have liked.

It took four months to assemble the big "coffle," to use a once-common word that, like so much of the vocabulary of slavery, has been effaced from the language. The company's agents sent people down to Franklin & Armfield's slavepens (another word

PHOTOGRAPHS BY WAYNE LAWRENCE

capital of the Confederacy—a city crowded with monuments to the Old South. She is a politician now, elected to the city council in the late 1990s and to the Virginia House of Delegates in 2009. One of her proudest accomplishments in politics, she says, has been to throw new light on an alternate history.

For example, she persuaded the city to fund a tourist walk about slavery, a kind of mirror image of the Freedom Trail in Boston. She has helped raise money for a heritage site incorporating the excavated remains of the infamous slave holding cell known as Lumpkin's Jail.

"You see, our history is often buried," she says. "You have to unearth it."

Not long ago I was reading some old letters at the library of the University of North Carolina, doing a little unearthing of my own. Among the hundreds of hard-to-read and yellowing

papers, I found one note dated April 16, 1834, from a man named James Franklin in Natchez, Mississippi, to the home office of his company in Virginia. He worked for a partnership of slave dealers called Franklin & Armfield, run by his uncle.

"We have about ten thousand dollars to pay yet. Should you purchase a good lot for walking I will bring them out by land this summer," Franklin had written. Ten thousand dollars was a considerable sum in 1834—the equivalent of nearly \$300,000 today. "A good lot for walking" was a gang of enslaved men, women and children, possibly numbering in the hundreds, who could tolerate three months afoot in the summer heat.

Scholars of slavery are quite familiar with the firm of Franklin & Armfield, which Isaac Franklin and John Armfield established in Alexandria, Virginia, in 1828. Over the next decade,



LUMPKIN'S JAIL.

"YOU HAVE TO UNEARTH IT" Virginia Delegate Delores McQuinn (right) has helped raise funds for a heritage site that will show the excavated remains of Lumpkin's slave jail (above).



that has disappeared) in Alexandria, just nine miles south of the U.S. Capitol: seamstresses, nurses, valets, field hands, hostlers, carpenters, cooks, houseboys, coachmen, laundresses, boatmen. There were so-called fancy girls, young women who would work mainly as concubines. And, always, children.

Bill Keeling, male

Age 11, height 4'5"

Elisabeth, female

Age 10, height 4'1"

Monroe, male

Age 12, height 4'7"

Lovey, female

Age 10, height 3'10"

Robert, male

Age 12, height 4'4"

Mary Fitchett, female

Age 11, height 4'11"

By August, Armfield had more than 300 ready for the march. Around the 20th of that month the caravan began to assemble in front of the company's offices in Alexandria, at 1315 Duke Street.

In the library at Yale I did a bit more unearthing and found a travelogue by a man named Ethan Andrews, who happened to pass through Alexandria a year later and witness the organizing of an Armfield coffle. His book was not much read—it had a due-date notice from 50 years ago—but in it Andrews described the scene as Armfield directed the loading for an enormous journey.

"Four or five tents were spread, and the large wagons, which were to accompany the expedition, were stationed" where they could be piled high with "provisions and other necessities." New clothes were loaded in bundles. "Each negro is furnished with two entire suits from the shop," Andrews noted, "which he does not wear upon the road." Instead, these clothes were saved for the end of the trip so each slave could dress well for sale. There was a pair of carriages for the whites.

In 1834, Armfield sat on his horse in front of the procession, armed with a gun and a whip. Other white men, similarly armed, were arrayed behind him. They were guarding 200 men

and boys lined up in twos, their wrists handcuffed together, a chain running the length of 100 pairs of hands. Behind the men were the women and girls, another hundred. They were not handcuffed, although they may have been tied with rope. Some carried small children. After the women came the big wagons—six or seven in all. These carried food, plus children too small to walk ten hours a day. Later the same wagons hauled those who had collapsed and could not be roused with a whip.

Then the coffle, like a giant serpent, uncoiled onto Duke Street and marched west, out of town and into a momentous event, a blanked-out saga, an unremembered epic. I think of it as the Slave Trail of Tears.

The Slave Trail of Tears is the great missing migration—a thousand-mile-long river of people, all of them black, reaching from Virginia to Louisiana. During the 50 years before the Civil War, about a million enslaved people moved from the Upper South—Virginia, Maryland, Kentucky—to the Deep South—Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama. They were made to go, deported, you could say, having been sold.

This forced resettlement was 20 times larger than Andrew Jackson's "Indian removal" campaigns of the 1830s, which gave rise to the original



POINT OF DEPARTURE Richmond was a hub for exporting slaves southward. In 1857 alone, says historian Maurie McInnis (above), sales came to more than \$440 million in today's dollars.

Trail of Tears as it drove tribes of Native Americans out of Georgia, Mississippi and Alabama. It was bigger than the immigration of Jews into the United States during the 19th century, when some 500,000 arrived from Russia and Eastern Europe. It was bigger than the wagon-train migration to the West, beloved of American lore. This movement lasted longer and grabbed up more people than any other migration in North America before 1900.

The drama of a million individuals going so far from their homes changed the country. It gave the Deep South a character it retains to this day; and it changed the slaves themselves, traumatizing uncountable families.

But until recently, the Slave Trail was buried in memory. The story of the masses who trekked a thousand miles, from the tobacco South to the cotton South, sometimes vanished in an economic tale, one about the invention of the cotton gin and the rise of “King Cotton.” It sometimes sank into a political story, something to do with the Lou-

vice provost at the University of Virginia, who curated the Richmond exhibit, stood in front of a slave dealer’s red flag that she tracked down in Charleston, South Carolina, where it had lain unseen in a box for more than 50 years. It sat under a piece of glass and measured about 2 by 4 feet. If you squinted, you could see pinholes in it. “Red flags fluttered down the streets in Richmond, on Wall Street in Shockoe Bottom,” she said. “All the dealers pinned little scraps of paper on their flags to describe the people for sale.”

Virginia was the source for the biggest deportation. Nearly 450,000 people were uprooted and sent south from the state between 1810 and 1860. “In 1857 alone, the sale of people in Richmond amounted to \$4 million,” McInnis said. “That would be more than \$440 million today.”

Outside universities and museums, the story of the Slave Trail lives in shards, broken and scattered.

The phrase “sold down the river,” for instance. During the move to the Deep South, many slaves found themselves on

Maryland.” A padlock was added to the handcuffs, and the hasp of each padlock closed on a link in a chain 100 feet long. Sometimes, as in Ball’s case, the chain ran through an iron neck collar. “I could not shake off my chains, nor move a yard without the consent of my master.”

(My own ancestors held slaves in South Carolina for six generations. I have studied Charles Ball and found no family link to him. But names and history contain shadows.)

Franklin & Armfield put more people on the market than anyone—perhaps 25,000—broke up the most families and made the most money. About half of those people boarded ships in Washington or Norfolk, bound for Louisiana, where Franklin sold them. The other half walked from the Chesapeake to the Mississippi River, 1,100 miles, with riverboat steerage for short distances along the way. Franklin & Armfield’s marches began in the late summer, sometimes the fall, and they took two to four months. The Armfield coffle of 1834 is better documented

**“A SINGULAR SPECTACLE,” SOME 200 MEN “MANACLED
AND CHAINED TO EACH OTHER,” LINING UP IN DOUBLE
FILE. “I HAD NEVER SEEN SO REVOLTING A SIGHT BEFORE.”**

isiana Purchase and the “first Southwest”—the young states of Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas.

Historians know about the Slave Trail. During the last ten years, a number of them—Edward Baptist, Steven Deyle, Robert Gudmestad, Walter Johnson, Joshua Rothman, Calvin Schermerhorn, Michael Tadmán and others—have been writing the million-person-migration back into view.

Some museum curators know about it, too. Last fall and this past spring, the Library of Virginia, in Richmond, and the Historic New Orleans Collection, in Louisiana, working separately, put together large exhibitions about the domestic slave trade. Both institutions broke attendance records.

Maurie McInnis, a historian and

steamboats winding down the Mississippi to New Orleans. There they were sold to new bosses and dispersed in a 300-mile radius to the sugar and cotton plantations. Many went without their parents, or spouses, or siblings—and some without their children—whom they were made to leave behind. “Sold down the river” labels a raft of loss.

The “chain gang” also has roots in the Slave Trail. “We were handcuffed in pairs, with iron staples and bolts,” recalled Charles Ball, who marched in several coffles before he escaped from slavery. Ball was bought by a slave trader on Maryland’s Eastern Shore, and later wrote a memoir. “My purchaser . . . told me that we must set out that very day for the South,” he wrote. “I joined fifty-one other slaves whom he had bought in

than most slave marches. I started following its footsteps, hoping to find traces of the Slave Trail of Tears.

The coffle headed west out of Alexandria. Today the road leaving town becomes U.S. Route 50, a big-shouldered highway. Part of Virginia’s section of that highway is known as the Lee-Jackson Highway, a love note to Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson, the two Confederate generals. But when the slaves marched, it was known as Little River Turnpike. The coffle moved along at three miles an hour. Caravans like Armfield’s covered about 20 miles a day.

People sang. Sometimes they were forced to. Slave traders brought a banjo or two and demanded music. A clergyman who saw a march toward Shenan-

doah remembered that the gang members, “having left their wives, children, or other near connections and never likely to meet them again in this world,” sang to “drown the suffering of mind they were brought into.” Witnesses said “Old Virginia Never Tire” was one song all the coffles sang.

After 40 miles, the Little River Turnpike met the town of Aldie and became the Aldie and Ashby’s Gap Turnpike, a toll road. The turnpike ran farther west—40 miles to Winchester, and then to the brow of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Every few miles, Armfield and his chained-up gang came to a toll station. He would stop the group in its tracks, pull out his purse and pay the man. The tollkeeper would lift the bar, and the coffle would march under it.

About August 25, they reached Winchester and turned south, entering the Shenandoah Valley. Among the people who lived in these parts was John Randolph, a congressman and a cousin of Thomas Jefferson. Randolph once wrote a friend to complain that the road was “thronged with droves of these wretches & the human carcass-butcherers, who drive them on the hoof to market.” Comparing Virginia to a stop on the West African slave trade, Randolph sighed, “One might almost fancy oneself on the road to Calabar.”

The gang headed down the Great Wagon Road, a route that came from Pennsylvania, already some centuries old—“made by the Indians,” in the euphemism. Along the way, the coffle met other slave gangs, construction crews rebuilding the Wagon Road, widening it to 22 feet and putting down gravel. They were turning out the new Valley Turnpike, a macadam surface with ditches at the sides. The marchers and the road-work gangs, slaves all, traded long looks.

Today the Great Wagon Road, or Valley Turnpike, is known as U.S. Route 11, a two-lane that runs between soft and misty mountains, with pretty byways. Long stretches of U.S. 11 look much like the Valley Turnpike did during the 1830s—rolling fields, horses and cattle on hills. Northern Shenandoah was wheat country then,

with one in five people enslaved and hoeing in the fields. Today a few of the plantations survive. I stop at one of the oldest, Belle Grove. The Valley Turnpike once ran on its edge, and the coffle of 300 saw the place from the road.

Relatives of President James Madison put up the stone mansion at Belle Grove during the 1790s, and it lives on as a fine house museum run by a historian, Kristen Laise. A walk through the house, a look at the kitchen where all the work was done, a walk through the slave cemetery, a rundown of the people who lived and died here, white and black—thanks to Laise, Belle Grove is not a house museum that shorts the stories of slaves.

Recently, Laise tells me, she stumbled on evidence that in the 1820s a large number of people went up for sale at Belle Grove. She pulls out an October 1824 newspaper ad, placed by Isaac Hite, master of Belle Grove (and brother-in-law to President Madison). “I shall proceed to sell sixty slaves, of various ages, in families,” Hite said. Hite expressed regret that he had to charge interest if buyers insisted on using credit. The nicest families in the Shenandoah tipped people into the pipeline south.

I pull in at various towns and ask around. In Winchester, the Winchester-Frederick County Visitor Center. In Edinburg, a history bookshop. In Staunton, the Visitor Center. In Roanoke, at a tourist information outlet called Virginia’s Blue Ridge.

Do you know anything about the chain gangs that streamed southwest through these parts?

No. Never heard of it. You say it was 150 years ago?

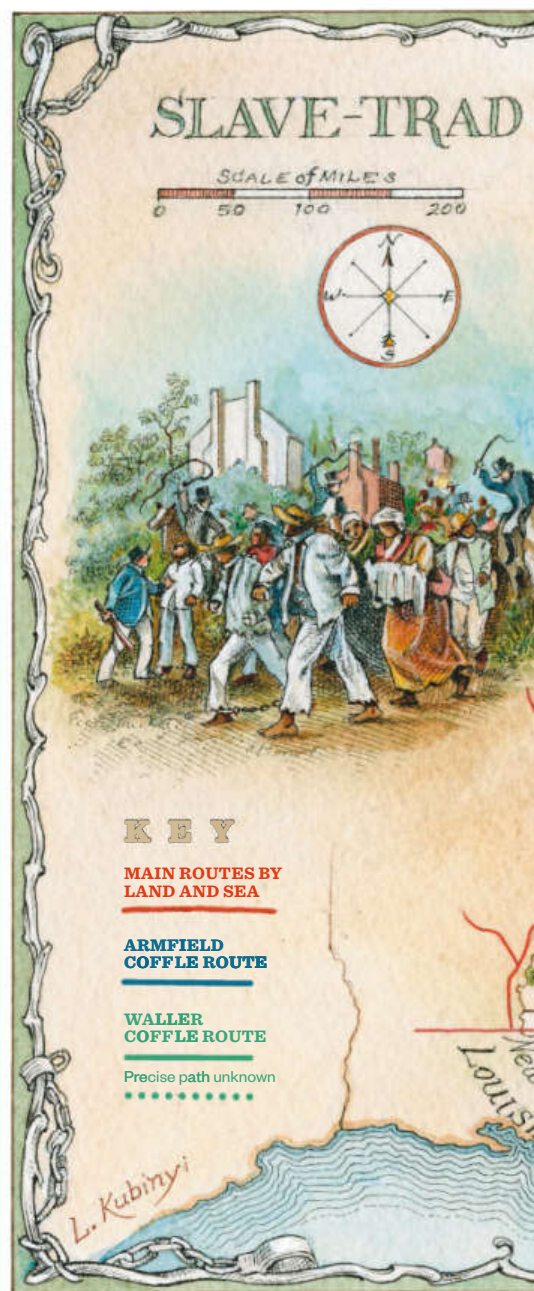
Well, more like 175.

Don’t know what you’re talking about.

People do know, however, about Civil War battles. The bloodletting here has a kind of glamour. A few people launch into stories about the brave Confederates. A few bring up their own ethnic lore.

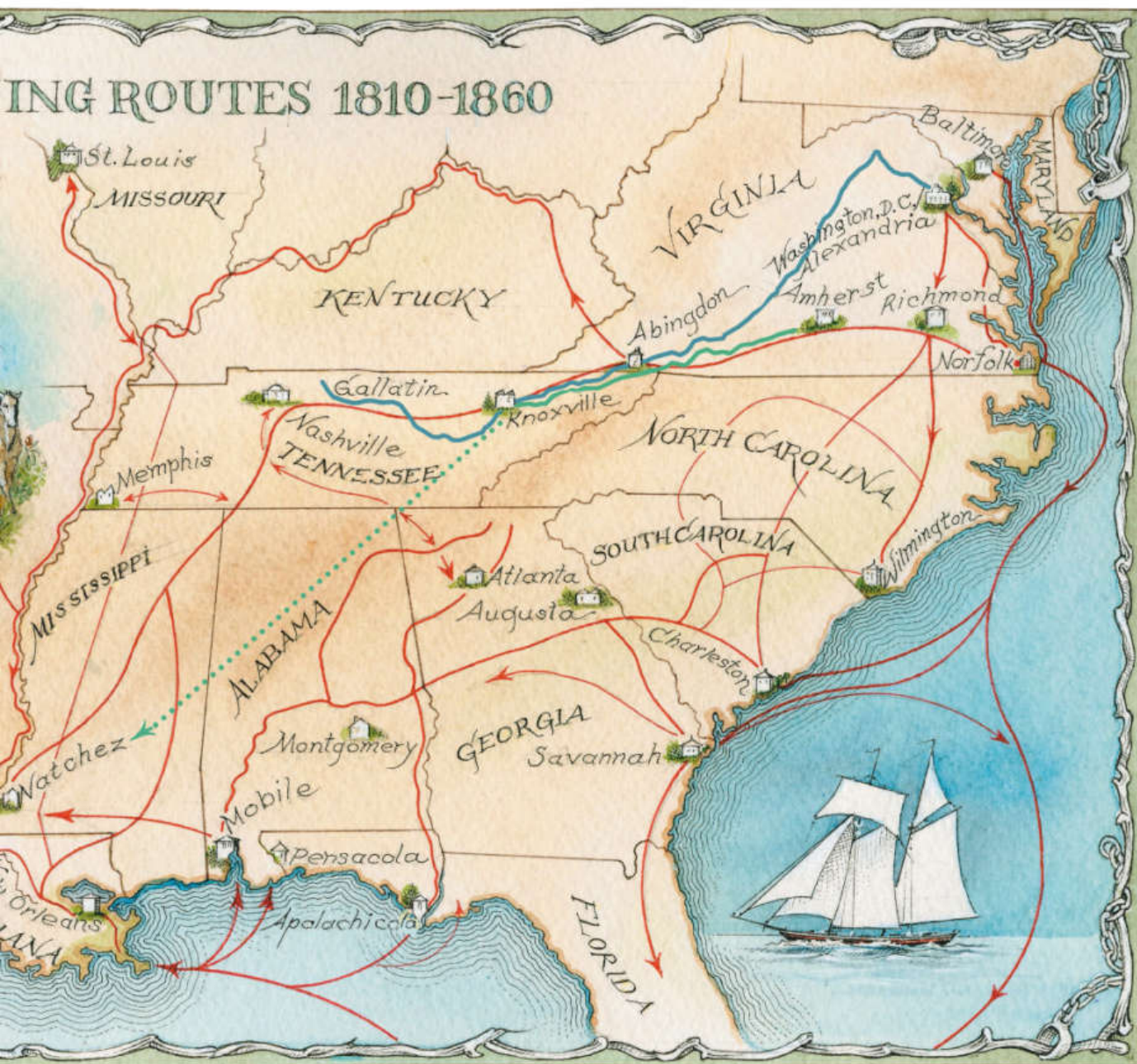
Well, Germans and Scots-Irish settled the Shenandoah, that’s who was here.

A woman at a tourist store clarified. *My oh my, the Scots-Irish—they were like made of brass.*



One night in September 1834, a traveler stumbled into the Armfield coffle’s camp. “Numerous fires were gleaming through the forest: it was the bivouac of the gang,” wrote the traveler, George Featherstonhaugh. “The female slaves were warming themselves. The children were asleep in some tents; and the males, in chains, were lying on the ground, in groups of about a dozen each.” Meanwhile, “the white men . . . were standing about with whips in their hands.”

Featherstonhaugh, a geologist on a



MAP SOURCES: DIGITAL SCHOLARSHIP LAB, UNIV. OF RICHMOND; EDWARD BALL; GUILBERT GATES; DACUS THOMPSON; SONYA MAYNARD

surveying tour for the federal government, described the slave trader as a raw man in nice clothes. John Armfield wore a big white hat and striped pants. He had a long dark coat and wore a mustache-less beard. The surveyor talked to him for a few hours and saw him as “sordid, illiterate and vulgar.” Armfield, it seems, had overpowering bad breath, because he loved raw onions.

Early the next morning, the gang readied again for the march. “A singular spectacle,” Featherstonhaugh wrote. He

counted nine wagons and carriages and some 200 men “manacled and chained to each other,” lining up in double file. “I had never seen so revolting a sight before,” he said. As the gang fell in, Armfield and his men made jokes, “standing near, laughing and smoking cigars.”

On September 6, the gang was marching 50 miles southwest of Roanoke. They came to the New River, a big flow about 400 feet across, and to a dock known as Ingles Ferry. Armfield did not want to pay for passage, not

with his hundreds. So one of his men picked a shallow place and tested it by sending over a wagon and four horses. Armfield then ordered the men in irons to get in the water.

This was dangerous. If any man lost his footing, everyone could be washed downstream, yanked one after another by the chain. Armfield watched and smoked. Men and boys sold, on average, for about \$700. Multiply that by 200. That comes to \$140,000, or about \$3.5 million today. Slaves were routinely

insured—plenty of companies did that sort of business, with policies guarding against “damage.” But collecting on such “damage” would be inconvenient.

The men made it across. Next came wagons with the young children and those who could no longer walk. Last came the women and girls. Armfield crossed them on flatboats.

Today, on the same spot, a six-lane bridge crosses the New River, and there is a town called Radford, population 16,000. I walk First Street next to the river and stop in front of a shop, “Memories Past and Present—Antiques and Collectibles.” A man named Daniel starts a conversation.

Local. Born 50 miles that way, Radford for 20 years. On the dark slope after 40, since you ask.

Daniel is pleasant, happy to talk about his hardscrabble days. He is white, a face etched by too much sun.

Trailer-park childhood. Life looking up since the divorce.

It is an easy chat between strangers, until I bring up the slave days. Daniel’s expression empties. He shakes his head. His face acquires a look that suggests the memory of slavery is like a vampire visiting from a shallow grave.

Armfield and his caravan came to the Shenandoah from Alexandria. Other coffles came from the direction of Richmond. One of them was led by a man named William Waller, who walked from Virginia to Louisiana in 1847 with 20 or more slaves.

In the deep archive of the Virginia Historical Society I discovered an extraordinary batch of letters that Waller wrote about the experience of selling people he had known and lived with for much of his life. Waller’s testimony, to my knowledge, has never been examined in detail. He was an amateur slave trader, not a prolike Armfield, and his journey, though from another year, is even better documented.

Waller was 58, not young but still fit. Thin and erect, a crease of a smile, vigorous dark eyes. He wore “my old Virginia cloth coat and pantaloons” on his march, as he told his wife, Sarah Garland—the daughter of a congressman and a grand-



FOR SALE.

ONE HUNDRED NEGROES FOR SALE,
At FOSTER'S SLAVE DEPOT, 157 Common street, at this time, 100 likely Negroes for sale, viz: No. 1 Field Hands, Cooks, Wa-hers, and Ironers; a No. 1 Carpenter, a No. 1 Engineer. Through the entire year will be found a large and well selected lot of Negroes, purchased expressly for this market, and will be receiving new supplies every week during the season. Having leased the house formerly occupied by Messrs. Peterson & Stewart as a Slave Depot, in addition to my place, will be able to furnish traders with Negroes for sale comfortable quarters. I shall in all cases endeavor to give satisfaction to all parties.
se24 6m

THOS. FOSTER,
157 Common street.

daughter of Patrick Henry, the orator and patriot. She was fancier than he.

The Wallers lived outside Amherst, Virginia, and owned some 25 black people and a plantation called Forest Grove. They were in debt. They had seen the money others were making by selling out and decided to do the same. Their plan was to leave a few slaves behind with Sarah as house servants and for William to march nearly all the rest to Natchez and New Orleans.

Waller and his gang reached the Valley Turnpike in October. “This morning finds us six miles west of Abingdon,” Waller wrote home from one of the richer towns. “The negroes are above all well—they continue in fine spirits and life and appear all happy.”

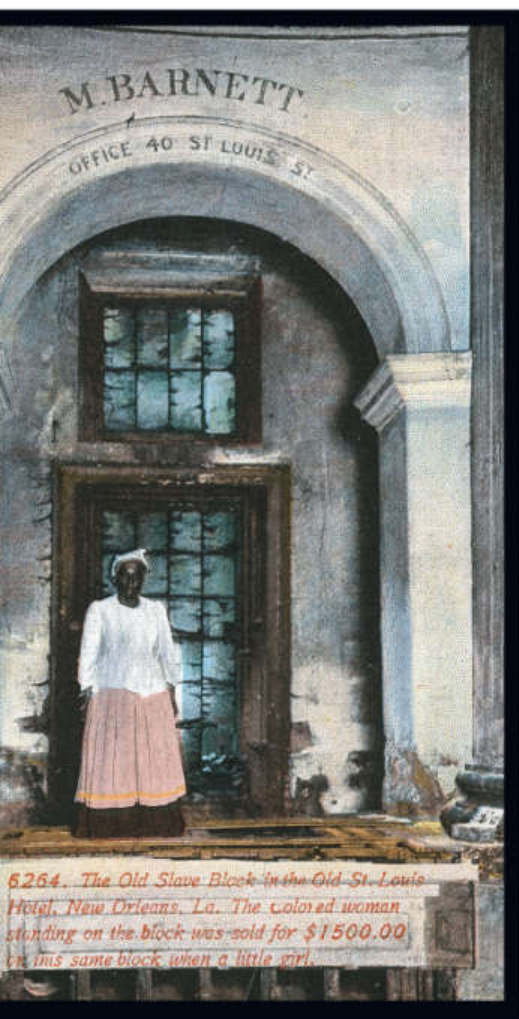
The sound of Waller’s letters home—he wrote some 20 of them on the Slave Trail—is upbeat, a businessman send-

SOLD AND BOUGHT As owners in the Upper South liquidated their assets (above, a newspaper ad), traders assembled groups of slaves in pens (top, in Alexandria, Virginia) and then shipped or marched them southwest. Many of those journeys ended in New Orleans, on the auction block at the St. Louis Hotel (above right).

ing word that there’s nothing to worry about. “The negroes are happy,” he says repeatedly.

But something happened early on, although it is not clear just what. Waller had been on the trail for two weeks when he wrote home to say, “I have seen and felt enough to make me loathe the vocation of slave trading.” He did not give details.

It is rare to have a glimpse of slaves enchained in a coffle, because the documentary evidence is thin, but Waller’s march is an exception. The people who



accompanied him included a boy of 8 or 9 called Pleasant; Mitchell, who was 10 or 11; a teenage boy named Samson; three teenage sisters, Sarah Ann, Louisa and Lucy; Henry, about 17; a man named Nelson and his wife; a man in his 20s called Foster; and a young mother named Sarah, with her daughter Indian, about age 2. There were others. The three sisters had been taken from their parents, as had Pleasant, Mitchell and Samson. Most of the others were under 20. As for Sarah and Indian, they had been taken from Sarah's husband and her mother. Waller planned to sell all of them.

As he pushed his "hands" down the pike, Waller felt guilty about Sarah and Indian, he told his wife. "My heart grieves over Sarah and I do wish it could be different," he wrote. "But Sarah seems happy."

Days and nights down the Valley Turnpike, the spine of the Blue Ridge, destination Tennessee, where Armfield would hand over his coffin and board a stagecoach back to Alexandria.

As U.S. 11 steps into Tennessee, the road finds the Holston River and runs parallel to it. Here the mountains thicken into the Appalachian South of deep hollows and secret hills. In the old days, there were few black people here, a lot of Quakers and the beginning of an antislavery movement. The Quakers have largely gone, and there are still many fewer black people than back in Virginia, 100 miles east.

I take the old route to Knoxville, but then get onto the freeway, Interstate 40. The path of I-40 west roughly matches a turnpike that once ran 200 miles across the Cumberland Plateau. The coffles followed the same route—through Kingston, Crab Orchard, Monterey, Cookeville, Gordonsville, Lebanon and, finally, Nashville.

At this point in the journey, other spurs, from Louisville and Lexington to the north, joined the main path of the Slave Trail. The migration swelled to a widening stream.

Armfield and his gang of 300 had marched for a month and covered more than 600 miles. When they reached Nashville, they would be halfway.

Isaac Franklin, Armfield's partner, kept house in Louisiana, but his thoughts were often in Tennessee. He had grown up near Gallatin, 30 miles northeast of Nashville, and he went there during off months. In 1832, at age 43, supremely rich from 20 years as a "long-distance trader," Franklin built a big house on 2,000 acres outside Gallatin. He called it Fairvue. Columned, brick and symmetrical, it was just about the finest house in the state, people said, second only to the Hermitage, the estate of President Andrew Jackson. Fairvue was a working plantation, but it was also an announcement that the boy from Gallatin had returned to his humble roots in majesty.

When Armfield turned up with his gang in Gallatin, he seems to have handed the group not to Isaac Franklin, but to

Franklin's nephew James Franklin.

In Gallatin, I drive out to look at the old Franklin estate. After the Civil War, it held on as a cotton plantation, and then became a horse farm. But in the 2000s, a developer began building a golf course on the fields where the colts ran. The Club at Fairvue Plantation opened in 2004, and hundreds of houses sprang up on half-acre plots.

Approaching the former Franklin house, I pass the golf course and clubhouse. A thicket of McMansions follows, in every ersatz style. Palladian manse, Empire français, Tudor grand, and a form that might be called Tuscan bland. People still come to show their money at Fairvue, like Franklin himself.

I ring the doorbell at the house the Slave Trail built. It has a double portico, with four Ionic columns on the first level and four on the second. No answer, despite several cars in the drive. More than one preservationist had told me that the current owners of Fairvue are hostile to anyone who shows curiosity about the slave dealer who built their lovely home.

The man may be gone, but generations later, some of his people are still around. I ask a Nashville museum director, Mark Brown, for help in finding a member of the family in the here and now. Two phone calls later, one of the living Franklins answers.

Kenneth Thomson opens the door to his house, which is clapboard and painted a pretty cottage yellow—quaint, not grand. Thomson says he is 74, but he looks 60. Short white hair, short white beard, khakis, cotton short-sleeve with flap pockets and epaulets. Shoes with crepe soles. A reedy voice, gentle manners. Thomson is an antiques dealer, mostly retired, and an amateur historian, mostly active.

"I am president of the Sumner County Hysterical Society," he cracks, "the only place you get respect for knowing a lot of dead people."

The first thing that meets the eye in Thomson's house is a large portrait of Isaac Franklin. It hangs in the living room, above the sofa. The house

bursts with 19th-century chairs, rugs, settees, tables and pictures. Reading lights look like converted oil lamps. He takes a seat at his melodeon, a portable organ that dates from the 1850s, and plays a few bars of period-appropriate music. It is plain that in this branch of the Franklin family, the past cannot be unremembered.

"Isaac Franklin had no children who survived," Thomson had told me on the phone. "His four children all died before they grew up. But he had three brothers, and there are hundreds of their descendants living all around the country. My direct ancestor is Isaac's brother James. Which means that Isaac Franklin was

was dabbling in some slave dealing on these trips—small amount, nothing big. He showed young Isaac how it was done, apprenticed him. Now, I heard this more than 50 years ago from my great-grandfather, who was born in 1874, or two generations closer than me to the time in question. So it must be true. The family story is that after Uncle Isaac came back from service during the War of 1812, which sort of interrupted his career path, if you call it that, he was all for the slave business. I mean, just gung-ho."

Thomson gets up and walks through the house, pointing out the ample Franklin memorabilia. A painting of the man-

At the same time, "that doesn't mean that he didn't have bad habits," Thomson clarifies. "He had some of those. But bad habits concerning sex were rampant among some of those men. You know they took advantage of the black women, and there were no repercussions there. Before he married, Isaac had companions, some willing, some unwilling. That was just part of life." I read, in many places, that slave traders had sex with the women they bought and sold. And here, someone close to the memory of it says much the same.

"Isaac had a child by a black woman before he married," Thomson says. In 1839, at age 50, he married a woman named Adelia Hayes, age 22, the daughter of a Nashville attorney. White. "So Isaac had at least one black child, but this daughter of his left the state of Tennessee, and nobody knows what happened to her. Actually, Uncle Isaac sent her off because he didn't want her around after he married."

It is possible, of course, that Isaac Franklin sold his daughter. It would have been the easiest thing to do.

Thomson brings out an article that he wrote some years ago for the *Gallatin Examiner*. The headline reads, "Isaac Franklin was a Well-liked Slave Trader." The thousand-word piece is the only thing Thomson has published on the subject of his family.

How does a person inside the family measure the inheritance of slave trading? Thomson takes a half-second. "You can't judge those people by today's standards—you can't judge anybody by our standards. It was a part of life in those days. Take the Bible. Many things in the Old Testament are pretty barbaric, but they are part of our evolution."

Thomson warms up, shifts in his seat. "I do not approve of revisionist historians. I mean, people who do not understand the old lifestyles—their standpoint on life, and their education, are what today we consider limited. That applies



my great-great-great-great-uncle."

It is an important gloss, as it turns out: "You see," Thomson said, "my forebear James Franklin was the family member who introduced Isaac Franklin to the slave business."

Taking a seat in an armchair upholstered in wine-colored brocade, he picks up the story. It was at the beginning of the 1800s. When the brothers were growing up in Gallatin, James Franklin, eight years older than Isaac, took his sibling under his wing. "They packed flatboats with whiskey, tobacco, cotton and hogs, floated them down to New Orleans, sold the goods on the levee, and then sold the boat," Thomson says. "My ancestor James

sion at Fairvue. A sofa and chair that belonged to Isaac Franklin's parents. A Bible from the family of John Armfield. "After Isaac died, in 1846, they published the succession, an inventory of his belongings," he says. "It ran to 900 pages. He had six plantations and 650 slaves."

What was it like to be in the room with Isaac Franklin?

"He knew what manners and culture were," Thomson says. "He knew how to be a gentleman. Most slave traders at that time were considered common and uncouth, with no social graces. Uncle Isaac was different. He had the equivalent of an eighth-grade education. He was not ignorant. He could write a letter."

"YOU CAN'T JUDGE" Kenneth Thomson (right, at home in Gallatin, Tennessee) is an indirect descendant of slave trader Isaac Franklin. An album (above left) identifies two members of another branch of the family.





to Southern history, to slave history.

"You know, I have been around blacks all my life. They are great people. When I grew up, we were servanted. All the servants were black. We had a nurse, a woman who used to be called a mammy. We had a cook, a black man. We had a maid, and we had a yard man. We had a guy that doubled as a driver and supervised the warehouse. And we had all these servants till they died. I wasn't taught to be prejudiced. And I'll tell you what nobody ever talks about. There were free blacks in the South that owned slaves. And there were lots of them. They didn't buy slaves in order to free them, but to make money."

Thomson emphasizes these last sentences. It is a refrain among Southern whites who remain emotionally attached to the plantation days—that one in 1,000 slaveholders who were black vindicates in some fashion 999 who were not.

Are we responsible for what the slave traders did?

"No. We cannot be responsible, should not feel like we're responsible. We weren't there." Are we accountable? "No. We are not accountable for what happened then. We are only accountable if it is repeated."

Thomson is sensitive to the suggestion that the family took benefit from the industrial-scale cruelty of Franklin & Armfield.

"In my family, people looked after their slaves," he said. "They bought shoes for them, blankets for them, brought in doctors to treat them. I never heard of any mistreatment. On the whole, things weren't that bad. You see, blacks were better off coming to this country. It is a fact that the ones over here are far ahead of the ones over there in Africa. And you know that the first legal slaveholder in the United States was a black man? That's on the Internet. You need to look that up. I think that's interesting. Human bond-

age began I don't know when, but early, thousands of years ago. I think slavery developed here primarily because of the ignorance of the blacks. They first came over here as indentured servants, as did the whites. But because of their background and lack of education, they just sort of slid into slavery. No, I don't believe in revisionist history."

I grew up in the Deep South, and I am familiar with such ideas, shared by many whites in Mr. Thomson's generation. I do not believe that black people were responsible for their own enslavement, or that African-Americans should be grateful for slavery because they are better off than West Africans, or that a black man was author of the slave system. But I recognize the melody, and let the song pass.

Kenneth Thomson brings out some daguerreotypes of the Franklins and others in his family tree. The pictures are beautiful. The people in them are well-dressed. They give the impression of perfect manners.

"The way I see it," he says, "there are a lot of people you have to bury to get rid of. To get rid of their attitudes."

Ben Key was a slave to Isaac Franklin at Fairvue. He was born in 1812 in Virginia. Franklin probably bought him there and brought him to Tennessee in the early 1830s. For reasons unknown, Franklin did not send Key through the burning gates of the Slave Trail, but made him stay in Tennessee.

At Fairvue, Key found a partner in a woman named Hannah. Their children included a son named Jack Key, who was freed at the end of the Civil War, at age 21. Jack Key's children at Fairvue included Lucien Key, whose children included a woman named Ruby Key Hall—

"Who was my mother," says Florence Blair.

Florence Hall Blair, born and raised in Nashville, is 73, a retired nurse. She lives 25 miles from Gallatin, in a pretty brick, ranch-style house with white shutters. After 15 years at various Tennessee hospitals, and after 15 years selling makeup for Mary Kay Cosmetics (and driving a pink Cadillac, because

she moved a ton of mascara), she now occupies herself with family history.

A lot of black people, she said, do not want to know about their ancestry. "They don't do family history, because they think, 'Oh, it was too cruel, and so brutal, and why should I look at it up close?' I am not one of those people."

Her research "is like a poke salad," she says, dropping a Tennessee-ism. A plate of pokeweed yanked up from the field and put on the table is one way of saying "a mess." Blair shifts metaphors. "Researching people who were slaves is like a mystery tale. You see the names. You don't know what they did. Some names in the lists are familiar. You find them repeatedly. But you don't know who the old ones are.

"So Ben Key's son Hilery Key, who was a slave born in 1833, and brother to Jack Key, my great-grandfather, was one of the 22 men who founded the Methodist Episcopal Church in this area. He was a minister. It must be in the genes, because I have a brother who is a minister, and a cousin who is a minister, and another relative. And in Gallatin there is a church named after one of the Key family preachers. Mystery solved," she says.

What do you think about Isaac Franklin? I wonder aloud.

"I don't feel anything per se," she says, benignly. "It's been a long time. And that's what the times were." She deflects the subject politely.

"I feel a certain detachment from it, I suppose. And that includes about Isaac Franklin. I think Franklin was a cruel individual, but he was human. His humanity was not always visible, but it was there. So as far as hating him, I don't have a strong dislike for him. Time kind of mellows you out. The older I get, the more tolerant I become. It was like that. He did it, but it is what it is. If you carry hatred or strong dislike for people, all you are doing is hurting yourself."

She laughs, surprisingly. "I wouldn't have made it too well in slavery days, because I am the kind of person who just could not imagine you would treat me the way they treated people. 'You going to treat me less than a dog? Oh, no.' They probably would have had to kill me, with

"WE CARRIED ON" Florence Hall Blair (at home in Nashville) is a descendant of a slave who worked on Isaac Franklin's estate. "If you carry hatred or strong dislike for people," she says, "all you are doing is hurting yourself."

my temperament.” She laughs again.

“You know, we carried on. Now I have five adult children, eight grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. I am married to a man with four children. Put them all together, we are like a big sports team. On holidays it is something, we have to rent a community center.

“We carried on.”

As autumn gathered in 1834, the caravan that John Armfield handed over left Tennessee, bound for Natchez. Records of that part of the journey do not survive, nor do records about the individual slaves in the coffle.

Like other Franklin gangs, the 300 probably got on flatboats in the Cumberland River and floated three days down to the Ohio River, and then drifted down another day to reach the Mississippi. A flatboat could float down the Mississippi to Natchez in two weeks.

The previous year, Franklin & Armfield had moved their jail and slave market in Natchez to a site on the edge of town called Forks of the Road. There—and this is conjecture, based on what happened to other gangs—half of the big gang might have been sold. As for the other half, they were probably herded onto steamboats and churned 260 miles south to New Orleans, where Isaac Franklin or one of his agents sold them, one or three or five at a time. And then they were gone—out to plantations in northern Louisiana, or central Mississippi, or southern Alabama.

Although the Armfield gang vanishes from the record, it is possible to follow in detail a coffle of people on the journey from Tennessee to New Orleans, thanks to William Waller’s letters.

In Knoxville, in October 1847, Waller readied his gang of 20 or more for the second half of their journey. He expected another month on the road. It would turn out to be four.

On Tuesday, October 19, the troop headed southwest, Waller leading from his horse and his friend James Taliaferro bringing up the rear, both

men armed. No steamboats for this group. Waller was pinching pennies.

In Virginia, the coffles marched from town to town. But here, they were marching through wilderness. Waller’s letters are imprecise on his route, and by 1847 there were a few roads from Tennessee into Mississippi. But during the 50 years coffles were sent on the Slave Trail, the road most taken was the Natchez Trace.

The trace was a 450-mile road—“trace” being the colonial word for a native trail through forest—and the only overland route from the plateau west of the Appalachian Range leading to the Gulf of Mexico. The Natchez people first carved the footpath some 500 years before and used it until about 1800, when they were massacred and dispersed, at which point white travelers took possession of their highway.

The Natchez Trace Parkway, with asphalt flat like silk, now follows the old route. Remnants of the original Trace remain out in the woods, 100 yards from the breakdown lane, mostly untouched.

Starting in Nashville I drive down the parkway. Overland coffles would have used the road that molders off in the trees. In place of towns were “stands” every 10 or 15 miles. These were stores and taverns with places to sleep in the back. Gangs of slaves were welcome if they slept in the field, far from business. Their drivers paid good money for food.

After Duck River, in Tennessee, came the Keg Springs Stand. After Swan Creek, McLish’s Stand. After the Tennessee River, where the Trace dips into Alabama for 50 miles, Buzzard Roost Stand. Swinging back into Mississippi, Old Factor’s Stand, LeFleur’s Stand, Crowder’s Stand, others.

Waller reached Mississippi by that November. “This is one of the richest portions of the state and perhaps one of the most healthy,” he wrote home. “It is a fine country for the slave to live in and for the master to make money in.” And by the way, “The negroes are not only well, but appear happy and pleased with the country and prospect before them.”

At the village of Benton a week before Christmas 1847, Waller huddled

A DIVERGENCE A sign (opposite) marks the site of the market just outside Natchez where slaves were bargained over rather than auctioned.

with his gang in a ferocious storm. “Exceedingly heavy and continued rains have stopped our progress,” he told his wife. “We have been stopped for two days by the breaking up of turnpikes and bridges. Although today is Sunday my hands are engaged in repairing the road to enable us to pass on.”

I put the car on the shoulder and walk into the woods to find the real Natchez Trace. It is easily stumbled into. And it really is a trace, the faint line of what used to be a wagon road. The cut is about 12 feet wide, with shallow ditches on each side. Spindly pine and oaks away off the roadbed, a third-growth woods. Cobwebs to the face, bugs buzzing, overhanging branches to duck. On the ground, a carpet of mud, and leaves beneath it, and dirt under the leaves.

The path the slaves took is beautiful. Nearly enclosed by green curtains of limbs, it feels like a tunnel. I squish through the mud, sweating, pulling off spiders, slapping mosquitoes and horseflies. It is 8 p.m., and the sun is failing. The fireflies come out in the dwindling dusk. And as night closes, the crickets start their scraping in the trees. A sudden, loud drone from every direction, the natural music of Mississippi.

It was typical on the Slave Trail: People like Waller marched a coffle and sold one or two people along the way to pay the travel bills. Sarah and Indian, the mother and daughter, wanted to be sold together. The three sisters, Sarah Ann, Louisa and Lucy, also wanted to be sold together, which was not likely to happen, and they knew it.

But as Waller drifted through Mississippi, he couldn’t sell anyone.

“The great fall in cotton has so alarmed the people that there is not the slightest prospect of our selling our negroes at almost any price,” he wrote home.

When cotton retailed high in New York, slaveholders in Mississippi bought people. When cotton went low,



See more historical images related to the Slave Trail at Smithsonian.com/trail

they did not. In winter 1848, cotton was down. "Not a single offer," Waller wrote.

His trip on the Slave Trail, like most others', would end in Natchez and New Orleans. Buyers by the hundreds crammed the viewing rooms of dealers in Natchez and the auction halls of brokers in New Orleans.

There was one place en route, however, with a small slave market—Aberdeen, Mississippi. Waller decided to try to sell one or two people there. At Tupelo, he made a daylong detour to Aberdeen but soon despaired over his prospects there: The market was crowded "with nearly 200 negroes held by those who have relations & friends, who of course aid them in selling."

Waller dragged his gang northwest, four days and 80 miles, to Oxford, but found no buyers. "What to do or where to go I know not—I am surrounded by difficulty," he brooded. "I am enveloped in darkness; but still, strange to say, I live upon hope, the friend of man."

It is peculiar that a man can pity himself for being unable to sell a room-

to a one-room barbershop with a corrugated metal front. Pretense and bluster rub shoulders with the plain and dejected. The old railroad station, a wooden building with deep eaves, is a used-record store.

Near a school playground in the middle of Raymond, I find the Dabney family graveyard, surrounded by an iron fence. Several of Thomas Dabney's children lie beneath granite stones. His plantation is gone, but this is where he arranged for a married couple, neighbors, to see Waller's Virginia gang. "They came to look at my negroes & wanted to buy seven or eight, but they



Samuel had condescended to him a few months before. "Samuel Garland said something about negro trading that makes me infer the Church is displeased with me. As far as I am concerned I have had pain enough on the subject without being censured in this quarter."

The remainder of the gang pushed on to Natchez.

Natchez, pearl of the state, stands on a bluff above the Mississippi. Beautiful houses, an antique village, a large tourist trade. But the tourist money is fairly recent. "There is no branch of trade, in this part of the country, more brisk and profitable than that of buying and selling negroes," a traveler named Estwick Evans wrote about Natchez in the early 19th century.

Just outside town, the Trace comes to an end at a shabby intersection. This is Forks of the Road, the Y-shaped junction formed by St. Catherine Street and Old Courthouse Road, where Isaac Franklin presided. His slave pen appears on old maps, labeled "negro mart."

"THEOPHILUS FREEMAN, WHO SOLD SOLOMON NORTHUP, OF TWELVE YEARS A SLAVE, OPERATED OVER THERE... BY 1835 THIS PLACE WAS ABUZZ WITH LONG-DISTANCE TRADERS."

ful of teenagers he has known since their birth, but as Florence Blair says, that's what it was.

"My plan is, take my negroes to Raymond about 150 miles from here and put them with Mr. Dabney and look out for purchasers," Waller told his wife. Thomas Dabney was an acquaintance from Virginia who had moved to Raymond, on the Natchez Trace, 12 years earlier and doubled his already thick riches as a cotton planter. "He writes me word that a neighbor of his will take six if we can agree upon price."

Today as then, Raymond, Mississippi, is a crossroads, population 2,000. At the central square are the contradictions of a Deep South village, both of Waller's time and the present. A magnificent Greek Revival courthouse stands next

objected to the price," Waller said. Dabney told him that "I must not take less than my price—they were worth it."

Waller was touched. "Is not this kind?" He later wrote home, "I have sold! Sarah & child \$800 . . . Henry \$800. Sarah Ann \$675, Louisa \$650. Lucy \$550. . . . Col. Dabney has taken Henry and is security for the balance—the three sisters to one man." He was relieved. "All to as kind masters as can be found."

Sarah Waller wrote in return, "I was much pleased to learn by your letter that you had sold at such fine prices." Then she added, "I wish you could have sold more of them."

Waller himself was a little defensive about this people-selling business. He complained that his wife's brother

Franklin once ran the biggest operation at Forks of the Road, moving hundreds of people every month. But by the time Waller arrived, Franklin was gone. After he died, in 1846, his body was shipped from Louisiana to Fairvue in a whiskey barrel.

Today at the Forks there is a muffler shop and, next to it, a gutter-and-awning business. Across the street, five historical markers stand on a naked lawn. No buildings on that half-acre. But if New Orleans was the Kennedy Airport of the Slave Trail, the grass at Forks of the Road was its O'Hare.

In Raymond, thanks to Thomas Dabney, Waller had gotten in touch with a slave seller named James Ware, a 42-year-old with Virginia roots. Waller knew his family. "By the polite invitation

of Mr. Ware,” as he put it, “I passed over a hundred miles with no white persons visible and got here to Natchez in four days.” He trotted into town in early 1848, the dwindling gang behind him. “This is the oldest settled portion of the state and bears the appearance of great comfort, refinement and elegance,” Waller wrote.

He was not describing the Forks, a mile east of the “nice” part of town. At the Forks, Waller found a poke salad of low wooden buildings, long and narrow, each housing a dealer, each with a porch and a dirt yard in front. The yards were parade grounds that worked like showrooms. In the morning during winter, the high selling season, black people were marched in circles in front of the dealers’ shacks.

Slaves for sale wore a uniform of sorts. “The men dressed in navy blue suits with shiny brass buttons . . . as they marched singly and by twos and threes in a circle,” wrote Felix Hadsell, a local man. “The women wore calico dresses and white aprons” and a pink ribbon at the neck with hair carefully braided. The display was weirdly silent. “No commands given by anyone, no noise about it, no talking in the ranks, no laughter or merriment,” just marching, round and round.

After an hour of this, the showing of the “lively” stock, the enslaved stood in rows on long overhanging porches.

They were sorted by sex and size and made to stand in sequence. Men on one side, in order of height and weight, women on the other. A typical display placed an 8-year-old girl on the left end of a line, and then ten people like stair steps up to the right end, ending with a 30-year-old woman, who might be the first girl’s mother. This sorting arrangement meant that it was more likely children would be sold from their parents.

At the Forks, there were no auctions, only haggling. Buyers looked at the people, took them inside, made them undress, studied their teeth, told them to dance, asked them about their work, and, most important, looked at their backs. The inspection of the back made or broke the deal. Many people had scars from whipping. For buyers, these were interpreted not as signs of a master’s cru-

elty, but of a worker’s defiance. A “clean back” was a rarity, and it raised the price.

After examining the people on display, a buyer would talk to a seller and negotiate. It was like buying a car today.

“Call me Ser Boxley,” he says. “It is an abbreviation, to accommodate people.”

The man in the South who has done the most to call attention to the Slave Trail was born in Natchez in 1940. His parents named him Clifton M. Boxley. During the black power years of the 1960s he renamed himself Ser Seshsh Ab Heter. “That’s the type of name I should have had if traditional African cultures had stayed intact, compared to Clifton Boxley, which is the plantation name, or slave name,” he says.

Ser Boxley was a big young man during the 1950s, raised in the strait-jacket of Jim Crow.

“I tried picking cotton right here, outside Natchez, and I never could pick 100 pounds,” he says. Machines did not replace human hands until the 1960s. “You would get paid \$3 for 100 pounds of picking cotton—that is, if you were lucky to find a farmer who would employ you.”

Boxley is 75. He is bearded white and gray, and half bald. He is direct, assertive and arresting, with a full baritone voice. He does not make small talk.

“I am drafted by the inactivity of others to do history work,” he tells me. “I want to resurrect the history of the enslavement trade, and for 20 years, that is where I’ve focused.”

He carries a poster, 4 by 6 feet, in the back of his red Nissan truck. It reads, in uppercase Helvetica, “STAND UP HELP SAVE FORKS OF THE ROAD ‘SLAVE’ MARKET SITES NATCHEZ MS.” He often holds the sign while standing next to the patch of grass that is the only visible remnant of Forks of the Road.

When I meet Boxley he wears red pants, brown slip-ons and a blue T-shirt that says, “Juneteenth—150th Anniversary.” Since 1995, he has annoyed the state of Mississippi and worried tourist managers with his singular obsession to mark the lives of those who passed down the Slave Trail through Forks of the Road.

He lives alone in a five-room cottage

in a black section of town, away from the camera-ready center of Natchez. The tan clapboard house—folding chairs and a hammock in the front yard, cinder blocks and planks for front steps—overflows inside with books, LPs, folk art, old newspapers, knickknacks, clothes in piles and unidentifiable hoards of objects.

“Watch out for my Jim Crow kitchen,” he says from the other room.

In the kitchen are mammy salt shakers, black lawn jockeys, Uncle Tom figurines and memorabilia of other irritating kinds—lithographs of pickaninnies eating watermelon, an “African” figure in a grass skirt, a poster for Country Style Corn Meal featuring a bandanna-wearing, 200-pound black woman.

In a front room, a parallel—dozens of photos of the slave factories of Ghana and Sierra Leone, where captives were held before being sent to the Americas.

Boxley left Natchez in 1960, at age 20. He spent 35 years in California as an activist, as a teacher, as a foot soldier in anti-poverty programs. He came home to Natchez in 1995 and discovered Forks of the Road.

The site is empty but for the five markers, paid for by the City of Natchez. The current names of the streets that form the Forks—Liberty Road and D’Evereaux Drive—differ from the old ones.

“I wrote the text for four of the markers,” he says, sitting on a bench and looking over the grass. “You feel something here? That’s good. They say there were no feelings here.”

He tells the back story. “In 1833, John Armfield shipped a gang of people to Natchez, where Isaac Franklin received them. Some had cholera, and these enslaved people died. Franklin disposed of their bodies in a bayou down the road. They were discovered, and it caused a panic. The city government passed an ordinance that banned all long-distance dealers selling people within the city limits. So they relocated here, at this

GUARDIAN OF THE FORKS Ser Boxley (right) returned to his hometown of Natchez at age 55. “Nowhere in this chattel-slavery museum town could I find . . . stories that reflected the African-American presence.”



junction, a few feet outside the city line.

“Isaac Franklin put a building right where that muffler shop is—see the peach-colored shed, across the street? Theophilus Freeman, who sold Solomon Northup, of *Twelve Years a Slave*, operated over there. Across the street was another set of buildings and dealers. You have Robert H. Elam operating in the site over there. By 1835 this place was abuzz with long-distance traders.

“When I got back to Natchez, at age 55, I saw the large tourism industry, and I noticed that nowhere in this chattel-slavery museum town could I find, readily and visibly, stories that reflected the African-American presence.” So he started advocating for the Forks.

He waves to a passing Ford.

“Ten years ago there was an old beer garden standing on this site, where whites watched football and drank, and there was a gravel lot where trucks were parked.” The city bought the half-acre lot in 1999, thanks largely to his agitation. Since 2007, a proposal to incorporate the site into the National Park Service has been creeping toward approval. An act of Congress is needed.

“My aim is to preserve every inch of dirt in this area,” Boxley says. “I am fighting for our enslaved ancestors. And this site speaks to their denied humanity, and to their contributions, and to America’s domestic slave traffickers. The public recognition for Forks of the Road is for the ancestors who cannot speak for themselves.”

I ask him to play a debating game. Imagine a white woman asks a question: *This story is hard for me to listen to and to understand. Can you tell it in a way that is not going to injure my sensitivity?*

“You got the wrong person to ask about sparing your feelings,” Boxley replies. “I don’t spare anything. It is the humanity of our ancestors denied that I am interested in. This story is your story as well as an African-American story. In



fact, it is more your story than it is mine.”

A black man asks: *I am a middle-class father. I work for the government, I go to church, have two kids, and I say this story is too painful. Can you put it aside?*

Boxley lets less than a second pass. “I say, your great-great-grandparents were enslaved persons. The only reason your black behind is here at all is because somebody survived that deal. The only reason why we are in America is because our ancestors were force-brought in chains to help build the country. The way you transcend the hurt and pain is to face the situation, experience it and cleanse yourself, to allow the humanity of our ancestors and their suffering to wash through you and settle into your spirit.”

A hundred yards from Forks of the Road, there is a low brick bridge across a narrow creek. It is 12 feet wide, 25 feet long and covered with kudzu, buried beneath mud and brush.

“A month ago the bridge was uncovered with a backhoe by a developer,” Boxley says. “Hundreds of thousands crossed this way—migrants, enslaved people, whites, Indians.” He turns.

“Peace out,” he says, and he is gone.

William Waller left for New Orleans during the second week of January 1848, taking an 18-hour steamboat ride. James Ware, Waller’s broker, was having no luck selling the truncated coffer in Mississippi. Among them were the field hand Nelson, plus

UNMARKED HISTORY New Orleans was the biggest slave market in the country. Curator Erin Greenwald (above) says the city’s total number of slavery-related monuments, markers or historic sites is precisely one.

his wife; a man called Piney Woods Dick and another nicknamed Run-away Boots. There was also Mitchell, a boy of 10 or 11, and Foster, 20-ish and strong, his “prize hand.” In Louisiana the top prices could be had for a “buck,” a muscled man bound for the hell of the sugar fields.

Waller had never been to such a big city. “You cannot imagine it,” he wrote home. As the steamboat churned to dock, it passed ships berthed five or six deep, “miles of them, from all nations of the earth, bringing in their products and carrying away ours.” The arrival, gangplank on the levee, cargo everywhere. “You then have to squeeze through a countless multitude of men, women, and children of all ages, tongues, and colors of the earth until you get into the city proper.”

He had heard bad things about New Orleans, expected to be frightened by it, and was. The people “are made in part of the worst portion of the human race,” he wrote. “No wonder that there should be robberies and assassinations in such a population.”

Greenwald, a curator at the Historic New Orleans Collection. “There is one marker on a wall outside a restaurant called Maspero’s. But what it says is wrong. The slave-trade site it mentions, Maspero’s Exchange, was diagonally across the street from the sandwich place.”

Greenwald stands in front of two beige livery coats hanging behind a pane of glass. The labels in the coats once read, “Brooks Brothers.” She is in the French Quarter, in a gallery of the archive where she works, and all around her are artifacts about the slave trade. The two livery coats, big-buttoned and long-tailed, were worn by an enslaved carriage driver and a doorman.

“Brooks Brothers was top-of-the-line slave clothing,” Greenwald says. “Slave traders would issue new clothes for people they had to sell, but they were usually cheaper.” She is petite, talkative, knowledgeable and precise. This year, she curated an exhibition at the Historic New Orleans Collection, “Purchased Lives: New Orleans and the Domestic Slave Trade, 1808-1865.”

people’s names, their color and place of origin. “All these people came from Virginia,” she says. “So it is likely they were force-marched from Albemarle County, Virginia, to Louisville, and then boarded a steamer downriver to here.” She waves a hand toward the Mississippi levee two blocks away.

She points to a beautiful piece of silk printed with the sentence, “Slaves must be cleared at the Customs House.” “It’s a sign that probably hung in staterooms on steamships.” A kind of check-your-luggage announcement.

“Now those,” gesturing at some more yellowed papers, “are the worst for me,” she says. “They are a manifest, or list, of one group of 110 people moved by Isaac Franklin in 1829. They record the names, heights, ages, sex and coloration as determined by the person looking at them. And there are many children on the list alone. . . .

“You have this understanding that children were involved. But here is a group with dozens, aged 10 to 12. Louisiana had a law that said children under 10 could not be separated from their

“ONE THING THAT IS HARD TO DOCUMENT BUT IMPOSSIBLE TO IGNORE IS THE ‘FANCY TRADE.’ THE ‘FANCY TRADE’ MEANT WOMEN SOLD AS FORCIBLE SEX PARTNERS.”

During the 50 years of the Slave Trail, perhaps half a million people born in the United States were sold in New Orleans, more than all the Africans brought to the country during two centuries of the Middle Passage across the Atlantic.

New Orleans, the biggest slave market in the country, had about 50 people-selling companies in the 1840s. Some whites went to the slave auctions for entertainment. Especially for travelers, the markets were a rival to the French Opera House and the Théâtre d’Orléans.

Today in New Orleans, the number of monuments, markers and historic sites that refer in some way to the domestic slave trade is quite small. I make a first estimate: zero.

“No, that’s not true,” says Erin

As she talks and points out objects, I notice something I had never seen during many visits to this archive: black people. Although the Historic New Orleans Collection is the city’s most serious and extensive history center, it attracted few blacks until this year.

“We in New Orleans have come a long way since Hurricane Katrina in terms of the comfort level of addressing certain subjects. Katrina was cataclysmic, and it changed the way people thought about our collective history,” Greenwald says. “We had never done a dedicated exhibition on the slave trade, on slavery. And it was really past time.”

She points to a document from the steamer *Hibernia*, which arrived from Louisville in 1831. The paper lists

mothers. And you see a lot of records in which there are an unusual number of 10-year-olds alone. These children were not 10. They were probably younger, but nobody was checking.”

Developing the exhibit, Greenwald and her team created a database of names of the enslaved who were shipped from the Eastern states to New Orleans. William Waller and his gang, and other hundreds of thousands arriving by foot, did not leave traces in government records. But people who arrived by ship did.

“We studied hundreds of shipping manifests and compiled a list of 70,000 names. Of course, that is only some.”

In 1820, the number of ships carrying slaves from Eastern ports into

New Orleans was 604. In 1827, it was 1,359. In 1835, it was 4,723. Each carried 5 to 50 slaves.

The auction advertisements at the end of the Slave Trail always said, “Virginia and Maryland Negroes.”

“The words ‘Virginia Negroes’ signaled a kind of brand,” Greenwald says. “It meant compliant, gentle and not broken by overwork.”

“One thing that is hard to document but impossible to ignore is the ‘fancy trade.’ New Orleans had a niche market. The ‘fancy trade’ meant women sold as forcible sex partners. They were women of mixed race, invariably. So-called mulatresses.”

Isaac Franklin was all over this market. In 1833, he wrote the office back in Virginia about “fancy girls” he had on hand, and about one in particular whom he wanted. “I sold your fancy girl Alice for \$800,” Franklin wrote to Rice Ballard, a partner then in Richmond. “There is great demand for fancy maids, [but] I was disappointed in not finding your Charlottesville

you can see in faded paint its old sign, which reads, “___ CHANGE.” The St. Louis Hotel was razed in 1916, but it was in the hotel that the Slave Trail ended in the most spectacular scenes.

At the center of the hotel was a rotunda 100 feet in diameter—“over which rises a dome as lofty as a church spire,” a reporter for the *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel* wrote. “The floor is a marble mosaic. One half the circumference of the rotunda is occupied by the bar of the hotel,” and the other half by entrances to the vaulted room. There were two auction stands, each five feet above the floor, on either side of the rotunda. And beneath the dome, with sunlight shafting down through windows in the apse, both auction stands did business simultaneously, in French and in English.

“The auctioneer was a handsome young man, devoting himself exclusively to the sale of young mulatto women,” the reporter wrote of a sale in 1855. “On the block was one of the most beautiful young women I ever saw. She

begged her new master to “buy little Jimmie too,” but he refused, and the child was dragged away. “She burst forth in the most frantic wails that ever despair gave utterance to.”

William Waller’s depression lifted after he left New Orleans and returned to Mississippi. “I have sold out all my negroes to one man for eight thousand dollars!” he told his wife. Then came second thoughts, and more self-pity: “I have not obtained as much as I expected, but I try and be satisfied.”

James Ware, the slave dealer Waller had met in Natchez, had come through on the sales, and he offered Waller an itemized statement. “The whole amount of sales for the twenty”—the entire group that had come with him from Virginia—“is \$12,675.” (About \$400,000 now.) The journey ended, the business done, Waller headed home. It was March 13, 1848.

“I am now waiting for a safe boat to set out for you,” he wrote. “Perhaps in an hour I may be on the river.”

“‘AIN’T YOU MY CHILD?’” GLENN RECALLED. “‘TELL ME, AIN’T YOU MY CHILD WHOM I LEFT ON THE ROAD NEAR MR. MOORE’S BEFORE THE WAR?’”

maid that you promised me.” Franklin told the Virginia office to send the “Charlottesville maid” right away by ship. “Will you send her out or shall I charge you \$1,100 for her?”

To maximize her price, Franklin might have sold the “Charlottesville maid” at one of the public auctions in the city. “And the auction setting of choice was a place called the St. Louis Hotel,” Greenwald says, “a block from here.”

The St. Louis Hotel is one of several places that can be identified as once-upon-a-time slave-trading sites. Next door to it was another, the New Orleans Exchange. The exchange’s granite facade can be still found on Chartres Street near the corner of St. Louis Street. On the lintel above the door

was about sixteen, dressed in a cheap striped woolen gown, and bareheaded.”

Her name was Hermina. “She was sold for \$1250 to one of the most lecherous-looking old brutes I ever set eyes on,” the reporter noted. That is the equivalent of \$35,000 today.

Here, too, in the St. Louis Hotel’s beautiful vaulted room, families at the end of the Slave Trail were divided. The same reporter described “a noble-looking woman with a bright-eyed seven-year-old.” When mother and boy stepped onto the platform, however, no bids came for them, and the auctioneer decided on the spur of the moment to put the boy on sale separately. He was sold to a man from Mississippi, his mother to a man from Texas. The mother

On April 1, Waller reached home. His wife and children greeted him. Also, an elderly black woman named Charity, whom he and Sarah had kept at home, knowing that no one would offer money for her. The slave cabins were vacant.

The first polite questions appeared in newspapers in the summer of 1865, right after the Civil War and Emancipation. Former slaves—there were four million—asked by word of mouth, but that went nowhere, and so they put announcements in the papers, trying to find mothers and sisters, children and husbands swept away from them by the Slave Trail.

Hannah Cole was one of them, maybe the first. On June 24, 1865, two months after the truce at Appomattox,

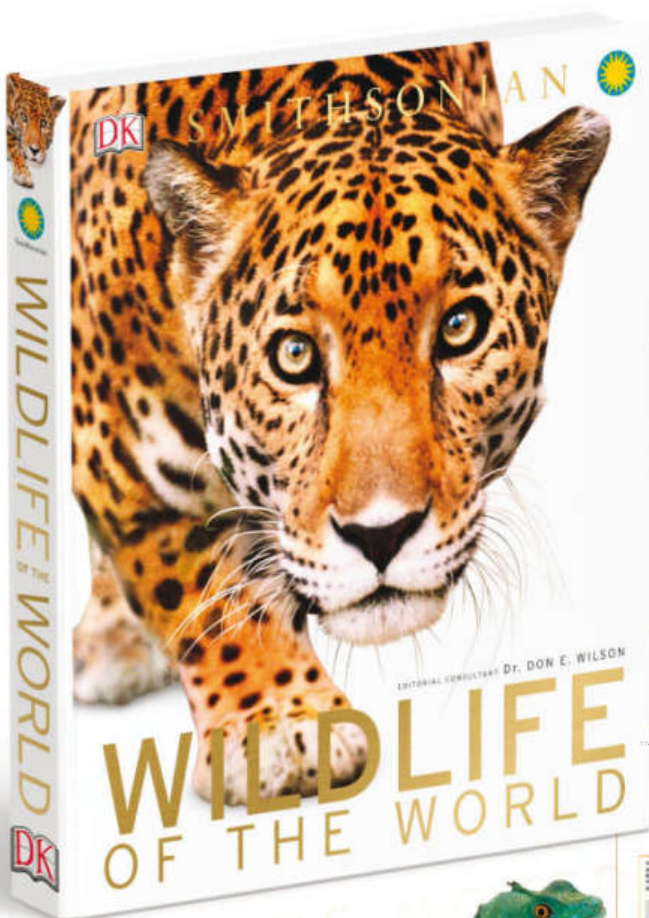


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in a Philadelphia newspaper called the *Christian Recorder*, she posted this:

Information Wanted. Can anyone inform me of the whereabouts of John Person, the son of Hannah Person, of Alexandria, Va., who belonged to Alexander Sancter? I have not seen him for ten years. I was sold to Joseph Bruin, who took me to New Orleans. My name was then Hannah Person, it is now Hannah Cole. This is the only child I have and I desire to find him much.

It was not an easy matter to place an ad. It took two days' wages if you earned 50 cents a day, what "freedpeople"—a new word—were starting to get for work. It meant hiring someone who could write. Literacy had been against the law for slaves, so few of the four million knew how to write.

But the idea grew.

The editors of the *Southwestern Christian Advocate* published their paper in New Orleans, but it went out to Methodist preachers in Arkansas, Mississippi, Tennessee, Texas and Louisiana. The paper started a column called "Lost Friends," a page on which people called out for family that had disappeared on the Slave Trail. One lost friend wrote:

Mr. Editor—I was bred and born in Virginia, but am unable to name the county, for I was so young that I don't recollect it; but I remember I lived twelve miles from a town called Danville. . . . I was sold to a speculator whose name was Wm. Ferrill and was brought to Mobile, Alabama at the age of 10 years. To my recollection my father's name was Joseph, and my mother's Milly, my brother's Anthony, and my sister's Maria. . . . My name was Annie Ferrill, but my owners changed my name.

The black churches picked it up. Every Sunday, preachers around the South looked out at congregations and read announcements from "Lost Friends" and columns like it. A message from a woman who had been snatched from her mother when she was a girl might reach hundreds of thousands.

I wish to inquire for my relatives, whom I left in Virginia about 25 years ago. My mother's name was Matilda; she lived near Wilton, Va., and belonged to a

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Mr. Percifield. I was sold with a younger sister—Bettie. My name was Mary, and I was nine years old when sold to a trader named Walker, who carried us to North Carolina. Bettie was sold to a man named Reed, and I was sold and carried to New Orleans and from there to Texas. I had a brother, Sam, and a sister, Annie, who were left with mother. If they are alive, I will be glad to hear from them. Address me at Morales, Jackson Co., Texas.—Mary Haynes."

Year after year the notices spread—hundreds, and then thousands. They continued in black newspapers until World War I, fully 50 years after Emancipation.

For almost everyone, the break was permanent, the grief everlasting. But the historian Heather Williams has unearthed a handful of reunions. One in particular gives the flavor.

Robert Glenn was sold at age 8 from his mother and father in North Carolina and spent the rest of his childhood in Kentucky. After Emancipation, now a "freedman" of about 20, Glenn remembered the name of his hometown—Roxboro. He knew how rare this was, so he decided to go back to his birthplace and look for his parents.

"I made a vow that I was going to North Carolina and see my mother if she was still living. I had plenty of money for the trip," he said. After a few days Glenn turned up in Roxboro. And there, in an accident hardly repeated by any of the million on the Slave Trail of Tears, he found his mother.

"I shook my mother's hand and held it a little too long, and she suspicioned something," Glenn said. She had seen him last when he was 8, and did not recognize him. The expectation of so many slaves was that their families would be annihilated, and so it became important to be able to forget.

"Then she came to me and said, 'Ain't you my child?'" Glenn recalled. "'Tell me, ain't you my child whom I left on the road near Mr. Moore's before the war?' I broke down and began to cry. I did not know before I came home whether my parents were dead or alive." And now, "mother nor father did not know me." ○

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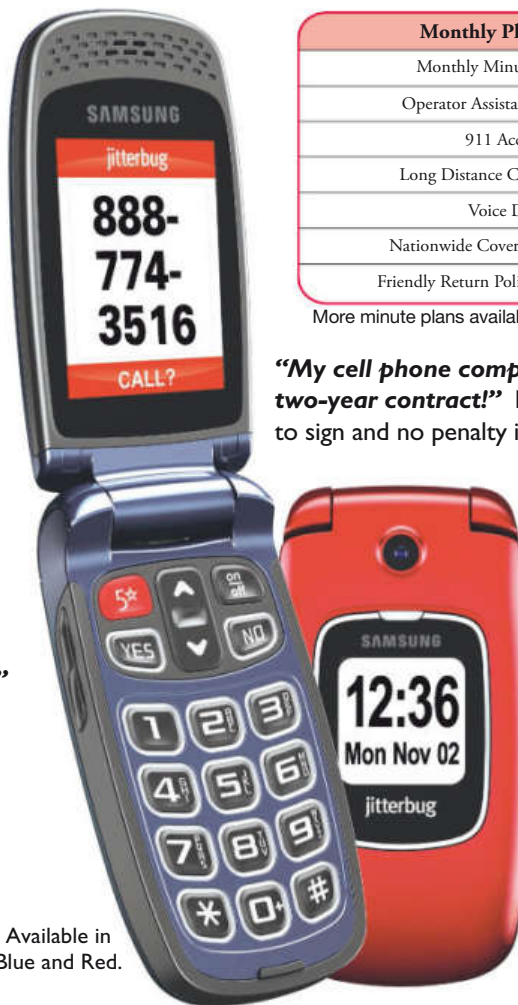
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Custer's wife, Libbie, outlived him by almost 60 years and promoted his image as a frontiersman, writing three books about his Plains exploits.

Custer

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 55

Custer had once served as an aide.

Custer's friends invited him to take part in the new craze for masked balls at the Academy of Music, "New York's sanctum sanctorum of high culture," as two historians of the city wrote. "Nouveau riche Wall Street brokers in fancy dress rubbed elbows and much else with the city's assembled demi-mondaines, attired in costumes that exposed much, if not all, of their persons. As the champagne flowed, mod-

esty was abandoned and the parties escalated to Mardi Gras levels." Custer attended one such "Bal Masqué" at the Academy of Music on April 14. He dressed as the devil, with red silk tights, black velvet cape trimmed with gold lace, and a black silk mask. Thomas Nast included Custer in a drawing of the ball for *Harper's Weekly*, surrounding it with political caricatures, including one of Johnson vetoing a bill intended to extend the Freedmen's Bureau.

Amid this attention, Custer grew callously self-indulgent. He wrote

to Libbie that he and old West Point friends visited "pretty-girl-waitress saloons. We also had considerable sport with females we met on the street—'Nymphes du Pavé' they are called." He added, "Sport alone was our object. At no time did I forget you." His words were hardly reassuring; his descriptions of alluring women seemed a deliberate provocation, especially since Libbie remained with her ailing father. At one party, he wrote, he sat on a sofa next to a baroness in a very low-cut satin dress. "I have not seen such sights since I was weaned." The experience did not make his "passions rise, nor nuthin else," but he added: "What I saw went far to convince me that a Baroness is formed very much like all other persons of the same sex."

One day he went to a clairvoyant with his fellow general Wesley Merritt and some "girls" whom he did not name to Libbie. A fad for spiritualism had grown in America ever since two young women claimed in 1848 to be able to communicate with a spirit through knocking sounds. With the great loss of life during the war, many survivors sought to contact the dead; even some intellectuals took clairvoyants and mediums seriously. "I was told many wonderful things, among others the year I was sick with typhoid fever, the year I was married, the year I was appointed to West Point, also the year I was promoted to Brig Genl. You were described accurately," Custer wrote to Libbie. The woman said he would have four children; the first would die young. He had had narrow escapes from death, but would live to old age and die of natural causes. She also said, Custer reported, "I was always fortunate since the hour of my birth and always would be." The group found her so spooky that the women refused to participate.

The clairvoyant also said "I was thinking of changing my business and thought of engaging in one of two

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things, Railroading or Mining.” Custer added, “(Strictly true.)” Money and politics filled his mind as he considered his future path. As he had said, he would have to make a great deal to live in New York, home to the key financial markets and Democratic leaders. He labored over the new race history and pedigree for Don Juan, citing horse-racing publications to replace the implicating original. In Washington he talked with Grant about taking a year’s leave of absence to fight for Benito Juárez in his revolution against France’s puppet emperor in Mexico, Maximilian I, in return for a promised \$10,000.

Grant wrote a letter of recommendation, though he interposed Sheridan between them: Custer “rendered such distinguished service as a cavalry officer during the war. There was no officer in that branch of service who had the confidence of Gen. Sheridan to a greater degree than Gen. C. and there is no officer in whose judgment I have greater faith than in Sheridan’s.” Then, as if he realized what he was doing, he added, “Please understand that I mean by this to endorse Gen. Custer to a high degree.”

pedigree, Custer now felt certain that he could sell the horse for its full value.

One month later Don Juan died of a burst blood vessel. Custer was left with nothing.

It would be too much to say that Don Juan provides the key to decoding



grew brittle and defensive. He questioned his career in the Army as New York teased his appetite for women, money and power. He envisioned a Custer who might never wear buckskins, never shoot a bison, never lead the 7th Cavalry against Cheyennes and Lakotas. He revealed aspects of himself that remain unknown to many Americans—his taste for luxury, his attraction to urban sophistication, his political partisanship. When Don Juan died, though, Custer’s civilian future disappeared.

With few options, Custer remained in the Army. He took Libbie to Fort Riley, Kansas, in the fall of 1866, following orders to report for duty as lieutenant colonel of the 7th Cavalry. He and Libbie later professed his devotion to the military and love of the outdoor life, but he struggled to reinvent himself as a frontier soldier. His self-indulgence continued through his first year in Kansas. He rode off from his column in the field to hunt

On June 25, 1876, Custer’s surprise attack on the Native American camp on the Little Bighorn left him and more than 200 of his men dead.

THE HORSE’S THEFT MARKED A TROUBLING DEPARTURE IN CUSTER’S LIFE, AND ITS DEATH CLOSED OFF A RANGE OF ALTERNATE FUTURES.

He did not go to Mexico. Secretary of State William Seward, wary of any U.S. involvement in another war, prevented it. But Custer had another means of securing \$10,000. He took Don Juan to the 1866 Michigan state fair to build interest in the stallion. After the last horse race on June 23, he rode Don Juan “at full speed past the stand, the horse displaying great speed and power,” the *Chicago Tribune* reported. “His appearance was greeted with tremendous applause.” Judges awarded Don Juan first prize over six thoroughbred rivals.

With this rousing appearance, national press attention and the recreated

Custer’s postwar life, or explains his death at the Little Bighorn ten years later. But the horse’s theft marked a troubling departure in Custer’s life, and its death closed off a range of alternate futures. Lee scarcely had surrendered at Appomattox Court House before Custer gave in to his self-indulgent, self-destructive tendencies. After risking everything in the war, he did not seem to realize how much he risked in claiming a reward. He entered into a difficult assignment in Texas with the general-in-chief insisting upon his guilt and demanding that he surrender his prize.

As always when challenged, he

a bison, then accidentally shot his own horse dead. He abandoned his assigned duties (and two of his men who had been gravely wounded in an ambush) in order to see Libbie, earning a court-martial, conviction and suspension.

He eventually returned to duty and regained both his footing and celebrity. Over the years he tested alternate careers, on Wall Street, in politics, as a writer or speaker. None of them worked well enough for him to leave the Army. And controversy always surrounded him, as it had since he sent a squad of men to search for Don Juan.

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Inventor of MyPillow®

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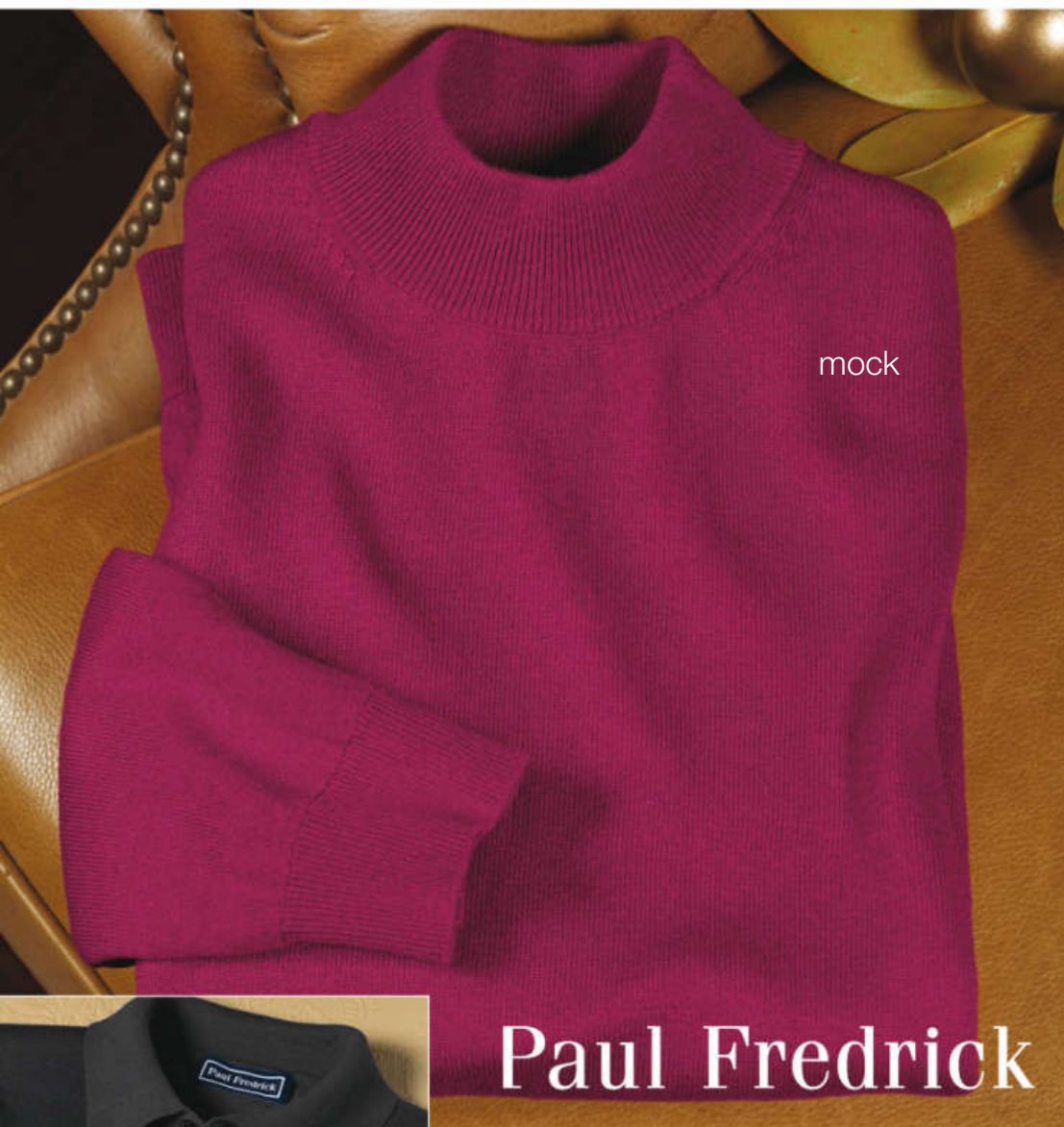


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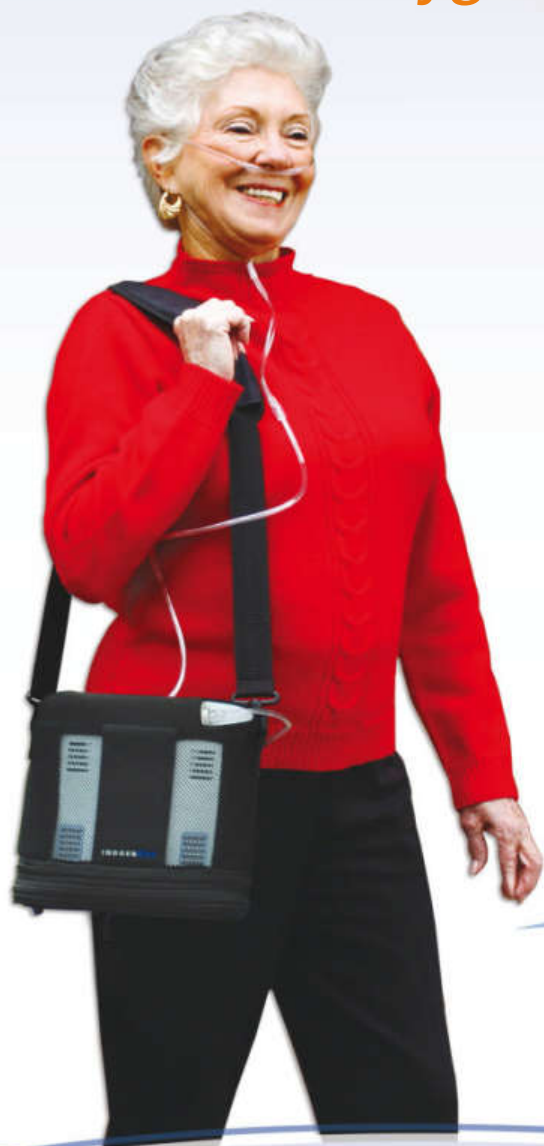
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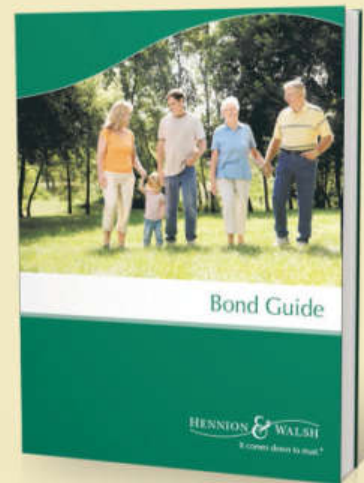
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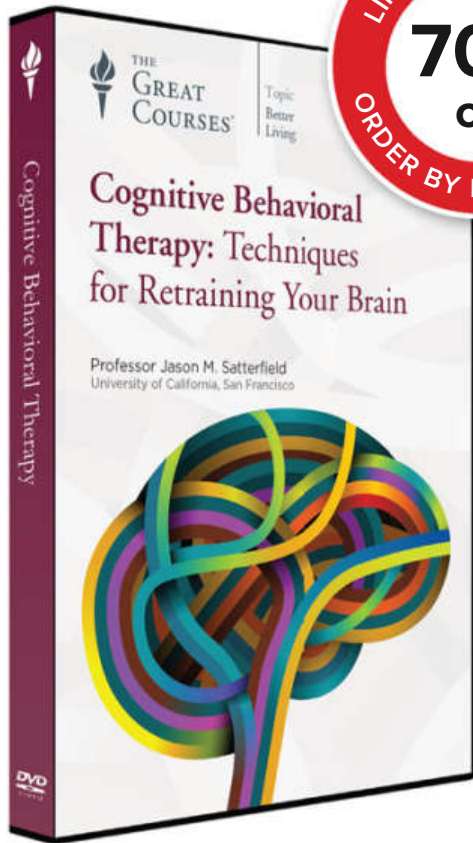
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Fourth Mole

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 33

Intelligence agencies cannot tolerate unsolved mysteries and loose ends. Long after the massive losses in 1985, the lingering questions still gnaw at their counterintelligence experts. Milton Bearden, who held several senior posts in his 30-year career at the CIA, is convinced there was a traitor, as yet undetected.

"Some of it just didn't add up," he says. "The mole isn't just some guy who stole a few secrets. He might be dead, or he's living in his dacha now. And the intelligence culture is not going to let that go. There is no statute of limitations for espionage. These things have to be run to ground."

If there is a fourth mole, and he is still alive, the FBI would surely want to catch him and prosecute him. The CIA would want to debrief him at length to try to determine the full extent of his treachery. If it should turn out that the mole is no longer alive, the intelligence agencies would still run a damage assessment to try to reconstruct what and whom he might have betrayed.

"That the KGB ran a 'fourth mole' is undeniable," Victor Cherkashin, a wily KGB counterintelligence officer, has written. Of course Cherkashin, who worked in the Soviet Embassy in Washington and handled Ames, may have been unable to resist a chance to taunt the FBI and the CIA.

It is possible that Gordievsky, Bokhan and Polshchuk fell under KGB suspicion through some operational error or communications intercept. But some highly experienced U.S. counterintelligence experts doubt it.

John F. Lewis Jr., a former FBI counterintelligence agent who was chief of the national security division, believes there is a fourth mole. "I always thought there was another one," he told me. "There were certain anomalies that took place that we just couldn't put our finger on."

And Bearden says, "I remain convinced there is a fourth man. Maybe a fifth. I talked to some old MI6 friends, and they say they are sure there is. Either one of ours or theirs."

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Why do astronauts aboard the International Space Station seem to float? The ISS is only about 200 miles above Earth—where, according to Newton, gravity is almost as strong as it is here on the ground.

Stan Pearson
Newport News, Virginia

They experience weightlessness not because of a lack of gravity but because the ISS, and they, are orbiting Earth in constant free fall, says *Valerie Neal, curator of space history at the National Air and Space Museum*. They're falling

toward Earth and moving forward at about the same velocity. Because the downward and forward forces are nearly equal, the astronauts are not pulled in any specific direction, so they float.

Did the colonists really mount a massive chain across the Hudson River during the American Revolution? The required engineering skill and smithing manpower would seem beyond them.

Jono Mainelli, New York City

They really did. In 1778, the colonists, who then produced 14 percent of the world's iron, forged the Great Chain to prevent a Royal Navy invasion upriver, says *David Miller III,*

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associate curator at the National Museum of American History.

The chain consisted of 750 links, each two feet long and weighing more than 100 pounds. Soldiers stretched the iron barrier, supported by log rafts, across the river at West Point. They removed it in winter, to keep it from being broken up by river ice, and replaced it in spring throughout the war.

It's generally known that a female honeybee's stinger will rip away after stinging, fatally for the bee. Why would natural selection favor such a defense mechanism? **Michael Nieters, Des Moines, Iowa**

This defense works for the colony, if not for the individual: Those females, worker bees, cannot reproduce, but their self-sacrifice defends the egg-laying queen. Also, says *David Roubik, an entomologist at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in Panama*, the parting of bee and stinger exposes a gland that releases a pheromone alerting other colony members to sting the victim at that spot.

How did "wink" become a unit of sleep, as in "didn't sleep a wink" or

"40 winks"? **Daniel Beltz, Rochester Hills, Michigan**

To "wink" meant to close one's eyes for sleep as early as the 14th century, says *Ives Goddard, senior linguist at the National Museum of Natural History*. But "40 winks" as a synonym for "nap" didn't appear until the 19th century, according to the Oxford English Dictionary. How that idiom evolved is a matter of speculation.

Methane decays rapidly in sunlight, so why or how is it a greenhouse gas? **Gary N. Miller, Davenport, Florida**

That decay is *relatively* rapid; methane still lasts about eight years in the atmosphere. And like every other greenhouse gas, it traps heat in the atmosphere by absorbing infrared radiation, says *Patrick Megonigal, deputy director of the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center*. In fact, methane is about 30 times more efficient than carbon dioxide as an infrared absorber.

TEXT BY **Katie Nodjimbadem**



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